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Watts

THE MEANING OF RATIONALISM

AND OTHER ESSAYS

THE

MEANING OF RATIONALISM

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

CHARLES WATTS

Author of "The Miracles of Christian Belief," "The Teachings of Secularism," etc.

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]

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TO

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE,

my "Guide, Philosopher, and Friend,"

whose suggestive work on Rationalism many years ago aided in emancipating my mind from the depressing influence of early orthodox teachings.

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PREFACE

THE past few decades have been remarkable, not only for general progress, but also for the rapid advancement of Rationalist principles, and consequently for the decline of the belief in orthodox teachings. Thoughtful persons recognise the force of Abercrombie's remark, that "it is the part of a well-regulated mind, not only to know the truths, but to know the grounds on which they are believed to be true." Not long since the habit was to test truth by Christianity; now Christianity is tested by truth. Formerly, reason was made surbordinate to faith; now faith has to yield to reason. At a period not very remote the usual custom was to rely with implicit obedience upon pulpit utterances; now, however, the number of those who fairly examine for themselves is undoubtedly increasing. Free and earnest inquiry is more extensive at the present time than it has ever been. The truth of Archbishop Whateley's statement is frankly acknowledged, that "the more confident you are on *just* grounds of being in the right, the more fearlessly ready should you be to hear all that can be urged on the other side."

One of the many mistakes of theologians is that they recognise no active progressive principles, but urge that the true faith was stereotyped about eighteen hundred years ago, and that all subsequent actions and duties must be shaped in its mould. Thus Rationalism has an important work to perform in seeking to destroy old notions which have proved detrimental to healthy mental growth, and in selecting new paths in the field of human thought.

In the following pages, therefore, I have endeavoured to briefly explain the philosophy of Rationalism and its relation to human conduct. The attitude of Agnosticism towards popular Theism, and the superiority of the theory of Evolution to that of Special Creation, are also indicated. The nature of Unbelief is considered, and the relative value of the belief in Nature and in the alleged Supernatural is pointed out. In the revision of the Essay upon Evolution, written some years ago, it has not been deemed necessary to interfere with its essential features, as they are not materially affected by the more recent expositions of the theory. The belief in immortality is likewise dealt with from a Rationalist standpoint. The direction that man's aspirations have taken upon this question is not surprising, for they are largely the outcome of that selfishness which is so distinguishing a characteristic of perverted human nature, which cares for no benefits but personal ones. Let us hope, however, that the time is not far distant when men will see that their conception of immortality had its origin in an erroneous interpretation of a natural sentiment, allied with a desire for personal gratification. How truly did Pope speak when he said that "Hell was built on spite, and heaven on pride."

C. W.

May, 1905.

THE MEANING OF RATIONALISM

THE Rationalist Press Association, in its Prospectus, defines Rationalism "as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority." Mr. George Jacob Holyoake has also well observed: "Rationalism advises what is useful to society without asking whether it is religious or not. It makes morality the sole business of life, and declares that, from the cradle to the grave, man should be guided by reason and regulated by science. It looks on man, for all practical purposes, as a purely material being—other systems have chiefly spiritualised him. It would have been well if they had spiritualised his miseries; but they have only refined into nothings his happiness, and left his wrongs and wretchedness solid, material, and enduring. Rationalism does not regard man through the distorting spectacles of theology, which reveals only wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores, but discovers in humanity the germs of indefinite moral progression, which the genial influences of truth, love, and justice will develop and nourish for ever."

This rational philosophy is based upon reason,

which is man's highest intellectual force. It is the faculty of judgment which discriminates, infers, and deduces, enabling us to premise future probabilities from past experience and to distinguish truth from error. In the words of Haeckel, "By reason only can we attain to a correct knowledge of the world." Reason, says Morell, is that which gives unity and solidarity to intellectual processes, "aiding us at once in the pursuit of truth and in adapting our lives to the state of things in which they exist" (*Mental Philosophy*, p. 232). "It is the guide and director of human activity" (*ibid.*, p. 235). Hooker, in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*, says reason determines "what is good to be done"; and Chillingworth, the eminent Christian writer, in his *Religion of Protestants*, observes: "Reason gives us knowledge; while faith only gives us belief, which is a part of knowledge, and is, therefore, inferior to it.....*it is by reason alone that we can distinguish truth from falsehood*" (quoted by Buckle in his *History of Civilisation*). Bishop Butler remarks: "Reason is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself" (*Analogy of Religion*, p. 176).

It is objected that reason is not infallible or uniform in its conclusions. This is true; but what guiding force exists that is? Man is fallible, and our concern should be to select a monitor which, judging by past experience, will lead to results that are in harmony with justice and general usefulness. The lesson of history and personal observation proves that real progress has ever been proportionate to the adoption of rationalistic principles. It is beyond all doubt that the theological systems which have so long dominated the world are far from being infallible and

uniform in their teachings; hence time and ability, which should have been devoted to endeavouring to solve the problems of existence, have been misused upon vain speculations that have no actual or reasonable basis. Reason has also been depreciated because it is urged that, through its promptings, the worst forms of persecution have been indulged in and the greatest mistakes have been made. It is, however, overlooked that such persecutions and mistakes were committed when reason was perverted by fanaticism and clouded by ignorance, thus depriving man of that mental balance which it is the function of reason to maintain under rational conditions. Reason is further objected to in that it ignores our emotional nature. This is not so; on the contrary, it fosters and regulates the emotions. There is no denying that some of the noblest thoughts born of human genius have emanated from the impulse of emotion, but it was when that emotion was controlled by reason. The difference in this particular between Rationalism and theology is that the former seeks to reach the heart through the head, while the latter aims to reach the head through the heart. In other words, the one appeals to the intellect, and the other to mere sentiment. The fact is, history records that excesses in every department of life have been the result of yielding to uncontrolled emotion; thus in religion we have had wild fanaticism, and in pleasure reckless licentiousness. Therefore, Rationalism teaches that cultivated reason is the only safeguard against the excessive gratification of the lowest of human passions. Be it remembered that, although reason is not infallible as a guide, it is the best one known to us; and to accept it as such is rational;

for prudence, the child of reason, dignifies the mind of man.

Rationalism urges that ethical culture is essential to well-being. If all theological systems were dispensed with, the happiness and welfare of the human race would still go on; but such would not be the case with the cessation of morality. If it were possible to abandon ethical conduct, society would be thrown into a state of chaos, and we should have no guarantee that progress would continue. Rationalism further contends that useful actions are not dependent upon theology, with its perplexing creeds and its contradictory dogmas. No one can truthfully deny that some of the noblest services to humanity have been rendered by men and women who had no sympathy whatever with the teachings of theology. From a Rationalist point of view, the highest duty of each and all is to promote the real happiness of the individual, and to maintain the moral stability of society by unselfish labour, by practising justice to others, and by trying to vindicate the great principle of universal freedom. As all persons cannot think alike, Rationalism eschews persecution for heresy, and encourages co-operation for the general good, irrespective of differences of opinion. The influence of Rationalism is clearly perceptible in the domain of ethics. It is becoming recognised more and more that an act is moral in proportion as it is useful to the community at large. The rational idea of a moral man is that he is one who does his best to produce and maintain a well-organised state of society, and who avoids as far as possible any conduct which he knows would injure himself or others. The ethical basis, according to Rationalism, is in human nature,

its incentive is human happiness, and its reward is peace and justice on earth. Before the growth of Rationalism to its present dimensions morality was thought in this country to consist in believing in some form of Christianity. Its basis was supposed to be God's will, its incentive the approval of Christ, and its reward happiness "beyond the grave." Rationalism has outgrown such primitive ideas of ethics. Whatever value religion may possess, it has no necessary connection with morality. The two were distinct in their origin, they have been disassociated in their history, and they still exist apart from each other. The Rationalist is impressed with the fact that it is morality that has modified religion, not religion that has modified morality.

Rationalism regards religion as a personal question, and urges that it consists, not in believing certain creeds and dogmas, but in doing good, adhering to truth, fostering love, and in enhancing the happiness of others as well as ourselves. Rationalism does not deny the existence of God or a future life. Upon such topics it is not thought rational to dogmatise. Where knowledge is absent, to either affirm or deny is sheer presumption. Hence the intellectually leading minds of the present time deem it consistent to take the Agnostic position upon these questions. Rationalism, however, submits that the belief in God and a future life involves problems that reason has not hitherto been able to solve. Therefore, it is considered more rational to act wisely upon what we know than to dogmatise upon that of which we have no knowledge. If God exist, he should recognise our efforts to endeavour to develop the noblest part of our nature, and to make the best, in its truest sense,

of this life. Such conduct upon our part should be accepted as some evidence that we should do the same in any future existence, if there be one. Further, Rationalism does not seek to destroy the truths of religion, but rather to divest religion of traditional error, and to adapt what good it may contain to the requirements of modern life. Thus Rationalism has a twofold object. In the first place, it seeks to rest conduct upon a reasonable basis, and, secondly, to allow intellect to dominate in deciding the value of all theological theories.

In its methods Rationalism is persuasive rather than recklessly aggressive. It relies upon constructive argument, not merely destructive denunciation. We have outgrown the old mode of propaganda, and we recognise more than ever the influences of our environment. We are, in this particular, like trees: we expand and grow from within, but often the iron band of circumstances that surrounds us prevents our free growth and expansion. We, therefore, adopt the rational plan of imparting a knowledge of the facts of existence as revealed by science and philosophy, believing that, in proportion as truth is recognised and accepted, error will disappear. Rationalism is bound by no ancient creeds, hampered by no alleged sacred books, nor marred by dread of punishment in some other world for entertaining unpopular opinions in this. Our desire, as Rationalists, is to urge a sound motive for conduct, which is that "the welfare of the people is the supreme law," to obtain freedom for all in matters of opinion, to promote ethical culture irrespective of theological teachings, and to foster friendly co-operation in spite of divergency of thought.

As the Rationalist Press Association puts it in its "Statement of Objects and Methods":—"Undoubtedly the progress of Rationalism must ultimately involve important changes in political institutions and social customs, as well as in philosophic theory and ethical sentiment. The irrationalism against which we fight appears not only in cults and creeds, but in anomalies of constitution and law, in social prejudices and abuses, in wasteful and oppressive economic conditions. But, while recognising the need of practical reforms in these and other directions, the Association does not bind itself to the advocacy of any particular social or political views. Individual Rationalists will, of course, form their own judgments upon such questions, which are in themselves of vast importance. On the other hand, the great principle of Rationalism must not be compromised by identification with opinions which are shared only by certain sections of liberal thinkers. Our main objects are philosophical, ethical, and educative: first, to promote a synthesis of history and science which will familiarise the individual with the knowable universe of which he is a member; second, to place human duty on the rational basis afforded by this knowledge, taken in conjunction with those ethical instincts which can be shown to make for the well-being of human society; third, to bring a true philosophy and a sound system of ethics within reach of the multitude."

Rationalism means the correction of theological errors by the process of reason and fair argument. While it claims for its adherents the right to think and speak freely, it concedes the same to others. Their views may be deemed erroneous, but it should be remembered that they probably look upon views

opposed to theirs in the same light. Injudicious advocacy does more harm to a good cause than open antagonism. Gentleness is one of the greatest of virtues, and to promulgate our opinions in what is conventionally, but very appropriately, termed a gentlemanly manner is to give them the stamp of amiability. Rash and reckless speaking is a most objectionable feature in any propagandism. To make extreme statements and wild assertions is not the rational method. Of course, destructive work must be done; but a man need not put himself into a passion in doing it, and especially he should not adopt that wild style which, while being deficient in logical arrangement and tact, strikes at random and wastes his strength. Persons who are mere sceptics, without any rational principle to guide or control their scepticism, are too much inclined to run into an opposite extreme from that which prevails in the theological world. While some rely entirely upon faith as their rule of life, others seem to attach too much importance to the lack of it. The latter contend that belief cannot save mankind, but they ignore the fact that neither can mere unbelief. The world requires deeds—great, noble, and consistent deeds. Society can only be reformed by works—that is, by moral acts which carry in their train all the real blessings of peace, kindness, justice, truth, and love. To perform work calculated to produce these desirable results is the aim of Rationalism. To make this philosophy a great power we must place our views before the public in an attractive light, and prove ourselves superior to some of those who differ from us, by avoiding the errors into which they have fallen.

Rationalism corrects the palpable mistakes of theologians, who regulate their conduct and control their actions by the records of the past or the conjectures of a future. Their rules of morality, their systems of theology, and their modes of thought, are too much a reflex of an imperfect antiquity. Those who cannot derive sufficient inspiration from this source fly into the fancied boundaries of another world—a future which is enveloped in obscurity, and upon which experience can throw no light. History has been subverted by this theological error from its proper purpose. Instead of being the interpreter of ages, it has become the dictator of nations; instead of being a guide for the future, it is really the master of the present. The proceedings of bygone times are thus made the standard of appeal at the present day; the wisdom of the first century is regarded as the infallible rule of the twentieth. Rationalism inculcates the very opposite of this. It objects to be hampered by the traditional teachings of the Church. The present generation possess the experience of their predecessors *plus* their own, and are, therefore, upon general questions, the wiser. According to the same principle, it is reasonable to expect that subsequent generations will be better informed than we are, as they will have additional experience to guide them. The very essence of Rationalism is its adaptability to the ever-varying necessities of the human race. Rationalism does not allege that virtues such as prudence, honesty, and benevolence are ever changing their inherent nature. On the contrary, they will for ever be binding upon man for the good reason that he cannot exist justly and happily without them. He must be prudent, or he may lose his all, and thus become a

burden to others; he must be honest, or he will be a criminal to society, and will have no guarantee for his own rights or for the safety of his own possessions; and he must be benevolent, or else he will neglect his duty to others.

Rationalism, instead of believing indiscriminately in creeds and Church doctrines, teaches that it is more useful to fairly examine all faiths submitted for consideration, and that we should accept whatever we may find therein that is reasonable, while rejecting that which is believed to be inimical to general progress. Rationalism relies on no dogmas, and pays no heed to religious theories about saving faith. It professes to know nothing about a world beyond the tomb, contending that, should there be one, its duties do not commence on earth. It inculcates the most positive duties of life, such as the study of physiology, by which man can learn to know himself; a knowledge of the chemistry of food, water, and air, whereby he may be able to maintain a healthy organisation; an acquaintance with the mental nature of man, which will enable him to know how circumstances impel in a certain direction, producing vice here, virtue there, morality at one time, and immorality at another; and a consciousness of domestic obligations that prompt men to provide by their own industry for those dependent upon them, and to seek to make provision by care and prudence for the evening of life. Above all, Rationalism emphasises the importance of practising the great virtues which are necessary to secure true happiness. These virtues are: Wisdom, for without this transitory and selfish pleasures may be mistaken for real happiness; Fortitude, which enables us to bear, when necessary, the deprivation of personal

comforts; Temperance, for with excess no permanent happiness is possible; Magnanimity, for only by aid of this virtue can we keep steadily in view the acquirement of the "greatest good of the greatest number"; Truth, for without it the stability of society could not be maintained; Justice, for it is the possession of the equal rights of all which inspires and impels us to seek the freedom and happiness of mankind. And to these great virtues of the mind we must add, as essential to true happiness, what are called the virtues of the heart, such as the fervour of Enthusiasm, and the finer fervour of Sympathy, or, to use the better name, Love. For, if wisdom gives the requisite light, love alone can give the requisite heat. Wisdom, climbing the arduous mountain solitudes, must often let the lamp slip from her benumbed fingers; must often be near perishing in fatal lethargy amid ice and snow-drifts, if Love be not there to cheer and revive her with the glow and the flames of the heart's quenchless fires.

From what has been here stated we trust that the meaning of Rationalism will be clearly understood, and that the misrepresentations of it which are so frequently given by its opponents will be corrected. Rationalism, in brief, teaches, in the words of Antoninus, that "A rational nature admits of nothing but what is serviceable to the rest of mankind."

SOME CHRISTIAN BELIEFS EXAMINED

I.—THE NATURE AND VALUE OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

It is reasonable to demand that definite evidence should be furnished in support of extraordinary claims. Proof that would be sufficient to secure our belief in an ordinary matter-of-fact occurrence would be inadequate to establish the truth of those claims which are generally put forward on behalf of certain Christian beliefs. According to Webster, evidence is "that which elucidates and enables the mind to see truth; proof arising from our own perceptions by the senses, or from the testimony of others, or from the induction of reason." Thus we have three methods through which evidence is to be obtained, and I propose to consider if either one of them is of any value in establishing the claims of Christian exponents.

1. *Consciousness.*—This method can only be of service where truths are self-evident, which those claimed for many Christian beliefs are not; therefore, if they can be corroborated at all, it must be from external sources. If Christian truths were self-evident, there would be no necessity for the efforts that are being constantly made to ascertain what the truths are. Moreover, we find that different persons have different conceptions of what Christianity really is, while many fail to recognise in any way its alleged verities. It appears to me that this would

not be so if Christian claims were based upon self-evident truths, for in that case they would command ready assent from every honest inquirer.

2. *Testimony.*—This method, to be valuable as evidence, should be thoroughly trustworthy, and ought to come to us through channels that are, beyond all doubt, unimpeachable. But, in reference to Christianity, the very opposite is the fact. Its testimony is found in the New Testament, which, as the Rev. Dr. Giles observes, contains "contradictions that cannot be reconciled, imperfections that would greatly detract from even admitted human compositions, and erroneous principles of morality that would have hardly found a place in the most incomplete systems of the philosophers of Greece and Rome" (*Christian Records*, Preface, p. 7). John W. Haley, M.A., in his work on *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, also states (pp. 1 and 2) that "no candid and intelligent student of the Bible will deny that it contains numerous discrepancies. That its statements, taken *prima facie*, not infrequently conflict with or contradict one another, may safely be presumed. This fact has been more or less recognised by Christian scholars in all ages." He further alleges in the same work (p. 2): "Moses Stuar (*Critical History and Defence of Old Testament Canon* p. 193; revised edition, p. 179), whose candour was commensurate with his erudition, acknowledges that 'in our present copies of the Scriptures there are some discrepancies between different portions of them which no learning or ingenuity can reconcile.' To much the same effect Archbishop Whately (*On Difficulties in the Writings of St. Paul*, essay 7, section 4) observes: 'That the apparent contradictions of

Scripture *are* numerous.....is too notorious to need being much insisted on.'" Now, testimony, coming through such a doubtful channel as these eminent Christian writers have stated the New Testament to be, cannot be depended upon as furnishing reliable evidence in favour of the extraordinary claims of Christianity.

3. *The Induction of Reason.*—The evidence to be derived from this method in support of Christianity is exceedingly slight. Reason gives no authority for the belief in the Fall of Man, Original Sin, Vicarious Sacrifice, the Trinity, the Miraculous Conception, Hell, and Eternal Torment. To many it seems most unreasonable to expect that all mankind, with their different trainings and varied mental capacities, should be compelled to accept one particular faith under a threat of the infliction of a most cruel and unjust penalty (see Acts iv. 10–12; Mark xvi. 16; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9); to believe that a good God would so have arranged matters that the majority of his children would be doomed to eternal perdition (see Matt. vii. 13, 14; Matt. xx. 16), and that God should have ordained some men to condemnation and others to dishonour before they were born (see Jude 4; Romans ix. 15–22). These are but a few specimens of a system against which reason revolts. The only "evidence" that can fairly be produced in favour of orthodox Christianity is that of faith and revelation. It was by these agencies that the greatest Bible blessings were said to have been obtained, and through which it is reported that St. Paul himself was convinced of its truth (see Hebrews xi.; Gal. i. 12). Such "evidence," however, is impotent as a practical argumentative force to-day.

In dealing with Christian evidences, we must not overlook the fact that the present age is one of unlimited inquiry, which should neither be baffled nor arrested—an age when many of the old landmarks of theology are being removed. We have thus to make a new survey of the controversial field, in order to ascertain our correct position. Indeed, we are frequently cautioned by modern Christian writers that we must attack the *latest* views put forth concerning their faith. This appears a reasonable request, for no sensible general would waste his powder upon forts that had been abandoned by the enemy. But the fact that Christians have been compelled to take up new positions in defence of their faith is certainly no evidence in its favour, but rather the opposite. Still, as they have forsaken their old citadels, it is necessary to follow them to their new battle-ground. The changes that have taken place in the advocacy of Christianity are indeed remarkable, and they afford striking evidence against the assumption of its being a God-sent religion. Here are a few of its principal mutations. At a period not very remote the whole of the Bible was believed to be the "word of God"; Christians of to-day assert that only a portion of the Scriptures should be so described. Hence plenary inspiration has been given up, and we are now informed that the Bible *contains* the "inspired word," but that the whole of it is not inspired. The question, however, arises, How are we to distinguish the inspired from the uninspired? Is the human to decide what is divine? If yes, the reason of man is superior to the revelation of God. If no, by what evidence are we to judge what is truth and what is error in the Bible? Miracles are now said to require evidence to

prove their truth, whereas in former times they were cited to prove the *truth* of Christianity. Prophecy is now thought to be the desire of the human heart, and is no longer depended upon as the infallible foreteller of future events. The fact that unbelievers have heroically faced death in attestation of what they deemed to be true has caused Christian exponents to give up the contention that martyrdom proves the truth of that for which a man becomes a martyr.

Now, surely it cannot reasonably be alleged that these changes and modifications afford any evidence of the stability of the Christian faith. To affirm that the Christians of the past were in error in their conceptions of the nature of Christianity does not remove the difficulty, because we have no evidence that the Christians of the present time are more correct in their representations of Christianity than were their predecessors. Both have had the same sources from which they drew their conclusions. Besides, what guarantee have we that Christians of future generations will not condemn the twentieth-century interpretation of their faith? The mutability which has hitherto characterised the Christian religion will, in all probability, continue as knowledge increases and mental freedom expands. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that, if Christianity were perfect at its inception, every subsequent change must necessarily have deteriorated its value; while, if it were not perfect at its origin, and if the alterations which it has undergone have improved it, then its present condition is the result of man's ingenuity, and the faith of to-day is not the production of what is called Divinity.

Professor Stewart, in his *Handbook of Christian Evidences*, says: "The evidences of Christianity do

not claim to be demonstrative, but to have a high degree of probability—as high as in the case of other principles which determine human action." But there is no analogy between Christianity and "other principles which determine human action." We have no evidence upon which we can depend as to the origin and early history of the Christian faith, and therefore we cannot consistently apply the law of probability to its birth and infancy. In human affairs we establish a "high degree of probability," either by personal investigation or upon the trustworthy testimony of others. In the case of the establishment of Christianity, however, we can adopt neither of these methods. Of course, personal examination is impossible; and, apart from the New Testament, there is no reliable testimony, either sacred or secular, as to the birth, life, and death of Jesus. Supposing the Gospel account of his birth is accepted, even then only one person could have testified as to its accuracy, and she maintained silence upon the subject. No other person then living could have vouched for its truth. How, therefore, is it possible for us to possess any evidence of the miraculous introduction of Christ into the world? At the most we have but an account of a rumour that is supposed to have been circulated two thousand years ago; and this rumour did not, it appears, reach the historians living at the time when the birth is said to have taken place. Even two of the special biographers of Christ seem to have known nothing of the event. This is where good testimony would be valuable; but it is not to be found in the two Gospels referred to.

It is quite useless to talk about "the nature and value" of the evidences of Christianity as many

theologians do, inasmuch as the institution of the faith is not the subject of any history that has survived to the present day. The documents that are alleged to have contained its earliest credentials cannot be traced. It is admitted by Biblical scholars that nothing was known of the New Testament for nearly two centuries after the events therein recorded were said to have happened; and it is also acknowledged that, from that period to the present, the book has been altered again and again. Now, remembering that these very Scriptures contain the principal evidence of the primitive history of Christianity, it will be seen that such evidence cannot be of any real value in the attempt to establish the validity of the Christian claims.

An important fact in connection with the value of Christian evidences is this, that the very nature of many of the events recorded in the New Testament is such that it is impossible to secure any proof that they took place. The age of implicit belief has gone, and the intelligent minds of to-day cannot be satisfied by being told that ages ago things occurred that are now known to be contrary to the experience of the world and to the laws of nature. The knowledge that certain phenomena result from natural causes should prevent men from ascribing them to agencies above, beyond, or outside nature. Hence evidences, to carry conviction, ought to refer to matters which accord with what is known of nature and of man. The fact is Christian evidences do not do this, for they are cited to prove the truth of a system which teaches many absurd improbabilities that no sane man would now believe upon any amount of testimony. For instance, what evidence would prove

to the existing generation that a child could be born without a human father, that the human body could possess at one time hundreds of devils, and that dead men could be raised to life from their graves? Such things are opposed to all reason, and yet they form a part of the teachings of Christianity.

The best evidence that can be adduced to prove the truth of any religion is the reasonableness of its doctrines and the practicability and usefulness of its ethics. With such advantages its truth becomes self-evident, and requires no elaborate treatises to prove its value. Now, it is of these two particular features that Christianity is deficient; its doctrines are mystical and absurd, and, so far as it has any unique morality, it is incapable of being reduced to practice in daily life. Of its doctrinal folly there is ample evidence in its teachings as to the Trinity, the scheme of salvation, the perplexity of Free-will, and the impracticability of the ethical inculcation of the Sermon on the Mount. It is true this "Sermon" has been frequently called the Magna Charta proclaimed by Christ, although it has never been made the basis of any human government. Its injunctions are so antagonistic to the requirements of modern civilisation that no serious attempt has ever been made to put them in practice. It may be mentioned that the genuineness of the "Sermon" has been boldly questioned by Professor Huxley, who writes: "I am of opinion that there is the gravest reason for doubting whether the Sermon on the Mount was ever preached, and whether the so-called Lord's Prayer was ever prayed by Jesus of Nazareth" (*Controverted Questions*, p. 415). The late Bishop of Peterborough said: "It is not possible for the State to carry out all

the precepts of Christ. A State that attempted to do so could not exist for a week. If there be any person who maintains the contrary, his proper place is in a lunatic asylum" (*Fortnightly*, January, 1890). Even supposing the historical claims for Christianity were supported by evidence, that would not be a sufficient set-off against the evidence of our time as to the inadequacy of Christianity to suit human requirements.

Before the claims of Christianity can be evidentially established, it must be proved that Christianity has self-evident truths and trustworthy testimony, and that its teachings harmonise with cultivated reason. In its history no self-interest or party zeal must be imported; candour and sincerity should be manifest, and bias and prejudice excluded. In its pages the difference between what was known to be true and what was but the mere belief of the time must be made clear. Such so-called historical evidence as consists of the imagination of poets, the theories of dreamers, or accounts of pretended supernatural events, is to my mind utterly worthless for the purpose of establishing the truth and value of any moral system. Taking the New Testament as the only source of evidence as to Christ and his religion, the student is advised to ascertain, if possible, for himself whether or not it is of the nature of genuine history. To us it resembles what Livy says of Scipio Africanus, that the account of his life, trial, death, funeral, and sepulture was so contradictory that he was unable to determine what tradition or whose writings he ought to credit. The whole question of Christian evidence resolves itself into this: Is it probable enough to deserve implicit belief?

Now, to sum up a fair estimate of Christian evidences. To me they appear to be destitute of all the essentials of true evidence, and to be entirely worthless in proving that Christianity is aught but a natural growth. During its various stages of development it has yielded to the force of its environments, whereby many of its elements have been changed and modified to suit the tastes and requirements of those who professed it at different epochs of history. I fail to discover a particle of legitimate proof to justify the orthodox claim that Christianity had a supernatural origin, that it has an unbroken history, and that to-day it stands pre-eminently above all other systems as a practical monitor of human conduct.

II.—GOD AND RELIGION.

Professor Stewart's chapter, in his *Handbook of Christian Evidences*, on "God and Religion," is a fair sample of orthodox exposition and defence. It is intended to justify the belief in a God who is described as the "First Cause, a self-existent Being, the Creator and Regulator of the Universe"; and also to establish as a fact "the reality, power, and universality of religion." This, however, it should be remembered, has nothing to do with the question of Christian evidences, inasmuch as, if the main contentions in this chapter were proved to be correct, it would not necessarily prove the existence of the Christian Deity, or that Christianity is "a universal phenomenon of human experience and history." The fact seems to be overlooked that there are other gods believed in besides the one depicted in the Bible, and that there are several religions professed which have but little in common with Christianity. The duty of an

expounder of Christian evidences appears to me to be to endeavour to show that the Theism of the Scriptures is reasonable, and that the religion based upon its teachings is true. Whatever is urged in reference to other religions may, or may not, be accurate, but it is of no value as Christian evidence.

Let me illustrate my meaning upon these points. The God believed in by Voltaire, Paine, Francis William Newman, and most of the adherents of what is termed "Advanced Theism," is certainly not the same Deity as is believed in by Christians, and therefore, if the existence of the God of the advanced Theists were demonstrated, it would not follow that the reality of the Bible God was established. The ablest of our modern Theists will not attempt to defend the "Supreme Being" of either the Old or the New Testament. The same argument applies to religion. It is not enough for an expounder of Christian evidences to make the general statement that religion is a fact, and to urge that a belief in some form of it is universal. Even if this were true, that would not prove the evidential claims made on behalf of the Christian system, which must be judged by its own merits. It is admitted that other religions, Buddhism for instance, is as sublime in its teachings as Christianity, and that the followers of Buddha are more numerous than the disciples of Christ. Up to the present time Christianity is not known by two-thirds of the human race; and among the one-third, where a knowledge of it obtains, the majority of the people have no practical faith in its teachings. As a matter of fact, religion *per se* may be true, while the Christian form of it may be false. Orthodox believers seem to ignore this truth. We need not dwell here

upon the original meaning of the term "religion," or upon the fact that with the Romans it did not signify merely theological worship, but it meant justice to the State and to the community. It is only necessary for my present purpose to remind the reader that Christian evidences have failed to show that the religion of the New Testament is unique, or that it is superior to other religious systems. The theory that Christianity has the advantage of the authority of revelation to support it has no force whatever, for, as Max Müller, in his *Science of Religion* (p. 45), observes, "the claims to a revealed authority are urged far more strongly and elaborately by the believers in the Veda than by the apologetical theologians among the Jews and Christians."

Professor Stewart, like most Christian advocates, puts it that the study of the Christian evidences must be preceded by "a conviction of the existence of God and of the reality and power of religion." Now, we submit that persons who are already convinced need no evidence to convince them, and, therefore, to seek for evidence to prove what is regarded as having been proved is, to say the least, a work of supererogation. Much importance is attached by Christian exponents to the alleged universal need that is said to be felt for religion. But the truth of this allegation will depend entirely upon the definition that is given of religion. If by the term we mean love, truth, justice, and benevolence, the cultivation of man's moral nature, the exemplification in our daily actions of fidelity to our professions, and due consideration for the rights and comforts of others, then, doubtless, most civilised persons are religious. But if by religion we mean the teachings of theology and its doctrines, then its

universal need has not been proved. Neither has it been shown that such religious ideas are innate; they are acquired as the result of early training and of general education. (See F. J. Gould's *Concise History of Religion*, vol. i., pp. 10–12.)

Professor Stewart endorses, as indeed most Christians do, among the definitions of religion, the following: "Religion consists fundamentally in the practical recognition of a constraining bond between the inward life of man and an unseen person." "The perception of the infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man." Now, to assert that religion, as it is here defined, is universal is the height of presumption. No one can recognise a "bond" between himself and "an unseen person," nor perceive "the infinite," who is able "to influence the moral character of man." The question is not whether such a "bond" and "the infinite" exist, but can we know of them? If, as I allege, we cannot, then they form no part of practical religion, which is, when properly understood, the ruling principle of a man's life. Now, we do know of many persons who acknowledge that they have no belief whatever in theological religion, and this fact alone is sufficient to destroy the contention of the universality of theology. There is a marked difference between the universal belief in some of the elements that are found in all the different religions of the world and the universality of one particular form of religion. The former may be true, while the latter is undoubtedly false, which proves that Christian evidences are of no value upon this point. For facts to prove that the belief in any one theological religion is not universal the reader is referred to Sir John

Lubbock's *Origin of Civilisation*, Tuttle's *Career of Religious Ideas*, and to vol. i. of F. J. Gould's *Concise History of Religion*. In these works ample evidence is furnished, upon the authority of travellers and missionaries, whose names are there given, that tribes and races of men have been found where there was not the slightest belief in any form of religion. Sir John Lubbock, on page 467 of his work above mentioned, says: "It has been asserted over and over again that there is no race of men so degraded as to be entirely without a religion, without some idea of a deity. So far from this being true, the very reverse is the case. Many, we might almost say all, of the most savage races are, according to the nearly universal testimony of travellers, in this condition." Burton states that some of the tribes in the Lake districts of Central Africa "admit neither god, nor angel, nor devil" (p. 468). "In the Pellew Islands Wilson found no religious building nor any signs of religion.....Some of the tribes (of Brazilian Indians), according to Bates and Wallace, were entirely without religion."

Professor Stewart frankly admits that "it is not by argument we obtain our conviction of the existence of God," but he adds: "Formal arguments in support of this conclusion are not useless." As this position is a very popular one among a certain section of Christians, and, moreover, as it is regarded as a part of the Christian evidences, it deserves a brief notice. In the first place, if argument will not secure conviction, there is no utility in attempting to supply it; yet "four forms" of an argument are given by Professor Stewart to prove the existence of God. They are as follows:—

1. The First Cause. The belief in this is considered to be more reasonable than to believe either in an unending series of natural causes or that things came "into existence without a cause." Here, it will be observed, creation is assumed without a particle of evidence being given in its favour; while no notice is taken of the theory of the eternity of the universe. Now, if it is unreasonable to believe that anything could come into existence without a cause (which it is), what about the alleged First Cause, which is held to be *un*caused? Is it not more reasonable to believe in the eternity of that of which we know something than in the *un*caused existence of that of which we know nothing?

2. It is stated that, as there are in the works of nature marks of intelligence and purpose, the author of nature must be intelligent. The weak and inconclusive feature in this argument lies in the inference that intelligence in nature must have had an intelligent author. This very point, upon which some evidence is required, is simply assumed without even any attempt being made to give reasons for the assumption. If the intelligence in nature needed a higher intelligence to produce it, is it not fair to suppose, upon the same principle, that this higher intelligence would require for its production a still higher intelligence? Further, if, in consequence of the existence of intelligence, it be more rational to believe that the universe was caused than to believe that it is self-existent, then must it not be equally rational to consider that this still higher intelligence was caused?

3. The allegation here is that our minds are so constituted that we are driven to the conclusion that God

is a being that *must be*. This is but an assertion, and, until some evidence is given in its support, it proves nothing. The same may be said of space, which we cannot conceive of as either beginning or ending.

4. We are here told that we have a feeling of responsibility to a personal and moral Being, and, therefore, we are led to infer his existence. To this an unqualified denial is given, for no such feeling of responsibility is found among savages or untaught persons. To attempt to show that the presence of a moral sense in cultivated man is a proof of the existence of a supernatural power is really too illogical to require further comment than to say that it is a pure assumption, and cannot possibly afford any evidence of a logical conclusion.

The case of Religion and God stands thus: The former, to be acceptable to the refined intelligence of the present age, should be free from all theological mysticism and doctrinal absurdity; and the latter can only be a question of subjective faith, not capable of argumentative demonstration. Christianity has not the required freedom, and, therefore, it is desirable that it should yield to a better faith—one that is more in harmony with the genius and mental culture of the twentieth century. As to the God of the Christians, with his Biblical record of folly, cruelty, and injustice, it may fairly be alleged that such a being is not suited as an object of worship; while in the earthquakes, cyclones, and volcanic eruptions that are constantly destroying the lives of thousands of innocent men, women, and children I fail to see any proof of love and kindness on the part of what is termed the God of Nature. In my opinion, no moral argument can be

based upon Theism in the presence of the fact that these calamities and disorders obtain in the world. So long as the lion and the tiger roam the forest pursuing their work of devastation and devouring their prey; so long as vice flourishes and virtue pines in want and misery; so long as "fraud glitters in the palace and honesty droops in the hovel," so long shall we be ready to exclaim with the Rev. George Gilfillan, who, in his *Grand Discovery of the Fatherhood*, when noticing the horrors and the evils that exist around us, asks: "Is this the spot chosen by the Father for the education of his children, or is it a den of banishment or torture for his foes? Is it a nursery, or is it a hell? There is no discovery of the Father in man, in his science, philosophy, history, art, or in any of his relations." Well may Dr. Vaughan, in his work, *The Age and Christianity*, write: "No attempt of any philosopher to harmonise our ideal notions as to the sort of world which it became a Being of infinite person to create, with the world existing around us, can ever be pronounced successful. The facts of the moral and physical world seem to justify inferences of an opposite description from benevolent."

III.—THEISM AND OTHER "ISMS."

In this section of his *Christian Evidences* Professor Stewart rejects Materialism, Pantheism, and Agnosticism, because they do not furnish a satisfactory "explanation of the universe." The usual Christian allegation is here made that, if we do not accept the theory offered by Theism (it should be said by *Christian* Theism), we are logically bound to submit another to take its place. But to this I emphatically demur, for it does not follow, because the above

"isms" fail to give an adequate explanation of the universe, that Christianity supplies the omission: that is what should be proved, but it is not. The assertion that God created matter and life is no *explanation* of the one or the other. In the light of modern science, it is clearly evident that the Bible account of the supposed origin of the universe and the creation of man—which contains the Christian theory —is utterly erroneous, and no sufficient evidence is produced to establish its validity.

It is not enough, therefore, for expounders of the Christian evidences to show that Agnosticism and Materialism have no theory to explain the why and wherefore of existence; they must, in order to make good their claim, prove that *their* hypothesis is a reasonable one. For instance, it must be demonstrated, as stated in the Old Testament, that the universe and Adam and Eve were created in six days, about six thousand years ago; that man was made from the dust of the earth, and that woman was made from one of his ribs; that the human race has degenerated from an original state of perfection; that death was the result of sin upon the part of Adam; and that, in the time of Noah, a universal flood "prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days," covering "all the high hills and the mountains," destroying "every living substance" except Noah "and they that were with him in the ark." Further, before the Christian theory can be accepted as being true, evidence should be forthcoming that man by nature is necessarily corrupt, and that in him "dwelleth no good thing" (see Romans iii. 23, vii. 18; 2 Cor. iii. 5; Phil. ii. 13, iii. 21; Psalm li. 5.); that the majority of those who are

now living are doomed to suffer after death the tortures of a burning hell (see Matt. vii. 13–14 and xxii. 14; 2 Thess. i. 7–9); that it is possible for all mankind to believe one thing—namely, salvation through Christ (see Acts iv. 10–12; Mark xvi. 16); and that the New Testament is accurate in describing persons who were suffering from physical disease as being possessed with devils. Now, the reader is requested to particularly note that, from a Christian point of view, the question is not, Are there any other theories of the universe apart from the one given by Christianity that will satisfy the critical test? As Christians claim that their theory is correct, it should be made to harmonise with the facts of science, philosophy, and experience. Up to the present no such harmony has been established.

The very fact that the theory of evolution has been accepted, even by many Theists, as a partial explanation of phenomena, is evidence that the Christian theory is not considered satisfactory. Granted that evolution does not come within the domain of demonstrated science, it does, however, agree with the science of probability, and Bishop Butler has said, "Probability is the guide of life." It should not be here overlooked that probability cannot apply to that of which nothing is known, hence it can have no reference to the alleged origin of the universe, or to its supernatural government, for these are questions of speculation, not of knowledge. The very thought of a beginning of the universe is unthinkable. As Dean Mansel observes: "Creation is, to the human mind, inconceivable." As to the term "supernatural," it means, in popular language, something higher than nature. But if there is a sphere higher than nature, and yet

often breaking through nature, nature itself must be limited by something, and the question arises, By what is such limitation fixed, and what is the boundary line which marks it off and separates it from the supernatural? Further, supposing such a line to be well known so that no difficulty could arise in pointing it out, a still greater problem presents itself for solution—namely, how man, who is a part of nature, and able only to come into contact with nature, can push his knowledge into that other sphere which, being non-natural, cannot be at all accessible to a natural being. If the supernatural region be synonymous with the unknowable, it cannot clearly concern us, simply because we have no faculties with which to cognise it, and no powers capable of penetrating into its profound mysteries.

In examining the Christian beliefs, we must enforce the contention that we have nothing to do with any other system but that of Christianity, for the reason that, if there were twenty other theories, and all were proved to be false, that would not make the Christian theory true. Materialism and Agnosticism have no theories as to the origin and government of the universe by an external power; and while, in the present inquiry, I am not concerned to defend either of these "isms," my desire is to correct an error into which Professor Stewart has fallen. In reference to Agnosticism, he observes: "The truth in Agnosticism is that man's knowledge of God.....is, though real, imperfect and inadequate." This is an inaccurate statement of the Agnostic position, which recognises no *knowledge*, either adequate or inadequate, of the existence of God. Agnosticism declares that the subject is outside our gnosis, and, while refusing to

dogmatically deny the existence of a Deity, it alleges that we can know nothing of him, since such a being as the one described by Theists transcends all our powers and faculties. The Agnostic is always willing to carry on his investigations into Nature to the utmost extent of his ability. He seeks to wring from her the secrets hidden through all the ages of the past; he pushes his inquiries from point to point, and learns all that can be known of the marvellous processes of life and mind; but the incomprehensible he seeks not to comprehend, and the unknowable he does not make the idle attempt to know. This course he deems more courageous, more dignified, and more candid than that adopted by the dogmatic theologian, who, yearning for a knowledge of the absolute, and yet failing to discover it, lacks the courage to avow his inability to achieve the impossible.

IV.—THE QUESTION OF REVELATION.

The positions taken by orthodox Christians upon the question of Revelation are: (1) That the Old and New Testaments contain a special revelation from God; that there are some parts of the Bible which are not divinely inspired, but are simply the recorded opinions of the writers; and that the New Testament is of more importance to Christians than the Old, because the latter was intended for the Jews. Some Christians, however, urge that, in order that the Jews may participate in the salvation offered through Christ, it is necessary that they should accept the New Testament as well as the Old. (2) That Biblical revelation was necessary, inasmuch as nature is not only insufficient as a guide to mankind, but that on many "an occasion of our sorest need" it "is blind and deaf to our

beseeching." Such is the statement of Professor Stewart, who adds: "We find it impossible to believe that a Supreme Being who is good would leave man without needed guidance, and that One who is wise and powerful could not discover a method of affording such guidance." (3) That the doctrine which denies that God "has revealed himself except through nature and conscience finds itself involved in difficulties when confronted with the problem of physical and moral evil." These are the three principal features which differentiate Christianity from natural religion.

As to the first position. If the *whole* of the Bible is not a revelation from God, how are we to decide which portions *are* inspired and which are not? If each person is to decide the question for himself, then, as the Rev. Dr. Caird has shown, other Bibles that inculcate teachings which are very different from those taught by Christianity may be considered as "divine revelations." Besides, this "explanation" makes the man decide what is "divine," which is fatal to the claims of Christianity. Moreover, against the validity of this Christian position the following objections appear to me to deserve attention: Could revelations which are contradictory in themselves emanate from a mind that is infinite and unchanging? If the latter revelation contains something which is superior to anything found in the earlier, is it not a reflection upon an all-wise and all-good God that he should have so long deprived his children of the superior communication? Supposing that God sent the Old Testament to the Jews, it is reasonable to presume that he knew that it would be sufficient for them. Is it not, therefore, impertinence to endeavour to force upon them the New Testament?

Another point that should be remembered is, that if this alleged new revelation were a direct communication from God, it could only have been so to the person or persons to whom it was made. A revelation to Paul would not be a revelation to us, and therefore it could be of no evidential value to the present generation. There is also to be considered the doubtful channel through which the New Testament has come down to us; the many abridgments and interpolations to which the documents have been subjected must necessarily have prevented it from being evidence in support of the Christian claims. Again, it does not appear that the writers of the New Testament professed that what they recorded was a revelation from God; they only claimed it to be a narration of what they saw and heard, and had gathered from the traditions of earlier periods. This seems the reasonable view that should be taken of the entire Bible, inasmuch as the numerous errors and contradictions which it contains make the fact self-evident that the book, as we have it to-day, could not possibly have been a revelation from a perfect Being.

The second position taken by Christians as to revelation is based upon the double fallacy of supposing that the New Testament gives us a better guide for human conduct than we find in nature, and that the God of Revelation is not "blind and deaf to our beseeching." Here, as in previous sections, we find orthodox assumptions taking the place of legitimate evidence. Can there be any doubt that the two important guides, cultivated reason and scientific facts, are to be attributed to nature? Where are these guides to be found in the Christian Revelation? In it faith is regarded as being higher than reason,

and reliance upon prayer as of more value than dependence upon science. It should be borne in mind that at one period of our history an attempt was made to accept this revelation as a guide of life, but it was found thoroughly inadequate as a monitor in human actions. The very effort to make it so completely paralysed the progress of science, the advancement of education, and the ethical growth of the age. Even now, when the "Peculiar People" take the teachings of this revelation as a guide, the results are unfortunate, for these consistent believers are punished for adhering to the assumed revealed instructions. It is only where reason and science, aided by human experience, guide the actions of mundane life that we find advancement leading to a higher and nobler civilisation.

Those who profess to believe that the God of Revelation is not "blind and deaf to our beseeching" should produce some evidence that their belief has a sound basis. It is of no value as evidence to remind us that Revelation promises that prayers shall be answered, unless it can be shown that the promises were fulfilled. And this has not hitherto been done. Have we not on record too many instances where loving parents have spent hours in "beseeching" that the lives of their children should be spared; of earnest prayers being offered up that pain and agony should cease; that poverty and despotism should no longer mar the happiness of the race? Were not special supplications sent to the God of Revelation to avert the deaths of Prince Albert, the Duke of Clarence, the Emperor of Russia, Abraham Lincoln, and President Garfield? In these cases not only personal, but national, "beseechings" were made to the God of Revelation that

the lives of these men should be saved; but he was "blind and deaf" to all "beseechings." It is no answer to say that in these instances it was not God's will that the prayers should be answered, for, if that were so, it shows the folly of "beseeching" him to do anything. The Bible tells us that God "knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Psalm xliv. 21); that he "doeth according to his will, and none shall stay his hand" (Daniel iv. 35); and that he "never changes" (Mal. iii. 6). If these "revealed" words are to be relied upon, where is the utility of "beseeching" him to help us at all? He knows when help is required, and, if he intends to render it, he will do so; but, if he does not, no "beseeching" will be of any avail, for he "never changes."

The third position involves the problem of the existence of physical and moral evil in the world. Professor Stewart, in his *Christian Evidences*, admits that there are difficulties connected with this question, and he contends that the Deists with their "God of Nature" cannot remove the difficulties, but that the Christians with their God of Revelation can. Referring to John Stuart Mill's essay *On Nature*, the Professor says: "It must be acknowledged that, if natural laws be all, and natural ends the only ends to be achieved, it is difficult to avoid the horns of Mill's dilemma, by which we are called upon to reject either the power or the goodness of God. And what is true of physical evil is still more apparent when we turn to consider moral evil. Perfect as the system of the world may have been when it left the hands of its Creator, who can doubt, in the face of daily experience, that it has somehow gone wrong? Christianity recognises this." Here it may be asked: "If the

system of the world" were originally perfect, how could it have "gone wrong"? And if God were all-powerful, why did he allow it to go wrong? The Christian's answer is that God could not give man liberty of choice without his having the option of going wrong. This is the proffered harmony between the existence of a God of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, and the existence of physical and moral evil. Now, it is difficult to see where the goodness of God is here manifest, for, from a human standpoint, it may be considered that, if a being had the power to keep the world right, it should have been impossible for it to have "gone wrong." It is admitted that there is physical evil in nature and moral evil in man; therefore, they must both possess a power independent of, and opposed to, infinite power. Is not this both absurd and contradictory?

The defenders of the claims of Christianity seem to ignore the following logical conclusions from their premises: If the Christian Deity be the creator of all things, then he must necessarily be the "God of Nature," and, in consequence, he is responsible for the pain and misery produced by such calamities as volcanoes, with their red-hot lava; the earthquakes and epidemics that destroy millions of human beings; the explosions in the mines which cause the deaths of husbands, fathers, and sons, upon whom whole families are dependent for the means of existence; the railway accidents; and the storms at sea. Now, these calamities occur either with or without God's interference. If with his interference, he is not all-good; if without, he is not kind and benevolent; and if they happen in spite of him, he is not all-powerful. Hence J. S. Mill says: "For, however offensive the

proposition may appear to many religious persons, they should be willing to look in the face the undeniable fact that the order of nature, in so far as unmodified by man, is such as no being whose attributes are justice and benevolence would have made with the intention that his rational creatures should follow it as an example" (Essay, *On Nature*, p. 25). A new version of the Doxology would not be here out of place, and it should read something like this:—

> "Praise God from whom all cyclones blow,
> Praise Him when rivers overflow,
> Praise Him who whirls the churches down,
> And sinks the boats, their crews to drown."

Briefly, the Rationalist objections to the orthodox belief in a book-revelation from God are as follows: That in the New Testament nothing of any value is revealed that was unknown to the world before. That the God of Revelation, being the Creator of all things, is responsible for the physical and moral evils in the world. That the same being who arranged for the redemption of man planned his fall, and surrounded that event with conditions that rendered moral freedom of no avail. That, if Adam and Eve before the Fall did not know good from evil, the power of choice to them was useless. That to postulate one infinite will as an absolute ruler of the universe, and then add millions of finite wills which are capable of thwarting the infinite one, is, to say the least, unreasonable. That no evidence has been produced which shows that the God of Revelation listens to human "beseechings" and supplies the wants of mankind more than does the "God of Nature." Finally, that cruel and unjust as nature is (which it ought not to be if it is the production of a good God), in it are contained the

remedies for the evils that can be removed. When this nature is modified and improved by man, it is found to be the only source from which the means are obtained that enable us to augment human happiness, and to promote the physical, intellectual, and ethical advancement of the human race.

V.—MIRACLES.

The question here is: Supposing miracles were ever wrought, would that be evidence that Christianity is a divine system? To prove that miracles have happened does not necessarily substantiate the belief in Christian miracles, because other religious systems also profess to be based upon the miraculous. Even the Bible admits that miracles occurred without divine aid. For proof of this the reader is referred to Deut. xiii. 1–3; Matt. xxiv. 24; Acts viii. 9, 10. Here it is clearly stated that miracles were actually performed by agencies the very opposite to those claimed by Christianity.

Professor Stewart says the miraculous is "evidence of the real and reliable character of the revelation, and of the divine source of the power, manifested in Christianity." But this is a fallacy upon the very face of it. What have miracles to do with the "reliable character of the revelation" in reference to the duties of life? If Christ did raise the dead, and perform other wonders, it would not make him accurate when he taught that this world should be considered as being only of secondary importance; that utter indifference should be manifested as to the future of mundane life; that a state of poverty is desirable; that prayer is a reliable source of material help; that salvation cannot be obtained except

through him; that the possession of devils was the cause of physical and mental disease; or that the world was to have come to an end during the lifetime of those to whom he was speaking. Because the "revelation" very properly advises children to honour their parents, it does not, therefore, follow that it is "reliable" when it says that Christ was born without a human father, or that he could have been in two places at the same time. Neither does it corroborate the idea that Christ the Son, who was "born of a virgin," was as old as God the Father, and that the Devil has been more potent than either of them. To make good the claims of Christian beliefs, their reliability must be established apart altogether from an appeal to miracles.

The Christian allegation, that the miracles which Christ is said to have performed prove that he was more than man, is equally fallacious. As already stated, wonders as great as those ascribed to Christ have been attributed to persons who are admitted to have been but human. Besides, some of the miracles credited to Christ do not harmonise with the wisdom, utility, and justice which are said to be characteristic of divinity. As evidence of this, the reader is requested to peruse the account of his cursing the fig-tree (Matt. xxi.); of his reckless destruction of another person's property by casting a herd of swine into the sea, so that they "perished in the waters" (Matt. viii. 32); and of his turning water into wine (John ii.).

Dr. Middleton, in his *Free Inquiry*, speaking of miraculous events, writes thus: "If either part be infirm, their credit must shrink in proportion; and, if the facts be especially incredible, they must of course fall to the ground, because no force of testimony can

alter the nature of things." If the unbiassed reader will test the miracles of Christ by the rule that this eminent Christian lays down, it will be seen how groundless the miraculous claims of Christianity really are. For, beyond doubt, many of the Christian "facts" are incredible; and, therefore, as the Doctor observes, "they must of course fall to the ground." Is it credible that "Lazarus should come from his grave, bound hand and foot with graveclothes," after he was dead and decomposition had set in? That certain saints who were dead and in their graves should rise and go into the city, and be heard of no more? That Christ should feed a hungry multitude of "about five thousand men, besides women and children," with five loaves and two fishes, and, when all were filled, that there should be twelve baskets full remaining? Such tales would not be believed to-day in connection with human affairs. Why, then, should they be thought reliable in support of a belief at which "reason stands aghast and faith itself is half confounded"?

It is worthy of note, as showing the weakness of the belief that Christ's miracles prove his divinity, that where he performed some of his principal works many of the people were not convinced of the genuineness of his professions. Faith was a necessary requisite for the belief in miracles. Where scepticism existed Christ's occupation as a Thaumaturgus was gone. Matthew informs us (xiii. 58) that Christ "did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." But, had the object of miracles been to prove the divine mission of Christ, it was in the midst of unbelief that they should have been wrought. Jesus seems to have succeeded tolerably well with his wonders

among ignorant, insane, and deaf-and-dumb people. When, however, he came in contact with thoughtful unbelievers, his *prestige* was gone. Hence, we read in Matthew (xi. 20): "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not"; and in John (xii. 37): "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." Here is a clear admission that, in Christ's time, some of his miracles were disbelieved and rejected. Is it expected that in the twentieth century we are more credulous than were our predecessors nineteen hundred years ago?

The question of the reality, or otherwise, of miracles is not here involved. Still, it may be urged, as against the Christian belief, that if the stories of the miracles of the New Testament were true, the attributes of an omnipotent, good, all-wise, and impartial God would be destroyed. Further, the perfection of his government would be rendered impossible. A miracle, as understood by the Church, implies a special act upon the part of God, and his interference with natural sequences. Now, all acts of God—supposing him to be the being Christians regard him—must be good acts. If, therefore, it were wise for God to perform certain acts nineteen hundred years ago, it would have been equally wise for him to have done so thousands of years previously. So long, therefore, as he abstained from performing those acts, so long did he withhold advantages from his children, and thereby deal unjustly towards them. To urge that an act of God may be good and necessary at one time and not at another is to reduce the government of God to a level with that of man, and to admit that

the "divine" economy is neither uniform nor perfect. Again, granting the existence of God, all sequences were arranged by him. If arranged by him, they were so arranged from eternity. Anything which acted contrary to that arrangement was either the result of an after-plan on God's part—in which case he is not all-wise and immutable—or the arrangement took place in spite of God, and in that case he is not all-powerful. We only know of existence as it is, and we judge of its nature and power from experience and investigation. From these sources of knowledge we learn that at certain degrees heat will burn, water will drown, and poison, in given quantities, will destroy life. To believe otherwise is for man to leave facts and reason, and to revel in fancy and credulity. The forces in nature, so far as we have discovered them, are regular in their order, and "constancy of succession marks their operations." These are truths that science has made known in modern times, and, if they were always relied upon, no belief in miracles could consistently be maintained.

The Rationalist view of the miraculous claims of Christianity may be thus briefly stated: (1) That it is impossible to prove from experience that Christ's miracles were ever performed. (2) That the only approach to evidence of their reality is testimony which is far from being reliable. (3) That it is not reasonable to suppose that God would work miracles and at the same time endow man with faculties which enabled him to reject them. (4) That it is true some events have occurred that have not yet been accounted for by natural law. If this were not the case, science would now have no unsolved problems to deal with. But we know that many events which were once thought to be

unaccountable have been traced by science to natural law; thus "the supernatural of one age has become the natural of another." (5) To the allegation, that religious interests require a departure from the ordinary laws of nature, it may be replied that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary laws has not been defined, and it cannot be defined until the extraordinary law is understood; and, when it is understood, actions in conformity thereto will not be considered miraculous. (6) If it be true that God specially interferes in the order of the universe, all certainty in human affairs is impossible. (7) If a person to-day were to say that one who was dead had been brought back to life, we should feel certain that that person had been deceived. Our conclusion would be based upon natural law, which there is no reason to suppose could ever have been violated. (8) Even if we admit the existence of supernatural power, before we can logically attribute any event to that power, should we not be prepared to state where the natural ends and where the alleged supernatural begins? Should we not, also, have some means of recognising the manifestations of that power? Because it is impossible to explain the why and the wherefore of certain effects, no one is justified in saying they are supernaturally produced. Until man knows all that nature can do, let him not presume to assert what it cannot do.

VI.—THE PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

Professed Christians regard Christ as the foundation and centre of their faith. Whatever weaknesses may be thought to belong to other alleged evidences of the truth of Christianity, it is said that Jesus is the invulnerable rock, without flaw or imperfection. This

extravagant and unprovable claim is sought to be maintained by Professor Stewart and other Christian defenders upon the following grounds: (1) That the superior excellence of Christ's character is acknowledged by opponents of Christianity. (2) That the outlines of his life are historical, and that the portraiture given of him in the Gospels harmonises with the belief of the earliest Christians. (3) That this portraiture, in the words of Professor Stewart, "must be either an invention or an idealised picture, or be drawn from actual knowledge of the person represented." It is contended that it is impossible for it to have been either of the first two, and, therefore, his character "is a strikingly original one." (4) It is further alleged that, if the claims which Christ puts forward in his own name are not justified, they evince a fanatical self-delusion, and are fatal to his moral reputation.

Such is the latest evidence given to prove the truth of the orthodox belief in Christ. That it is inadequate for the purpose is easily demonstrated; for, even if admitted that the facts are as stated in the first three positions here set forth, it does not, therefore, follow that the claims of Christianity are established. The fact that certain sceptics hold a high opinion of Jesus; that the earliest Christians based their belief on the portraiture of the Gospels, which are supposed to be, in their "main outlines," historically accurate; and that the character drawn of Christ is original, can in no way prove the truth of all that is taught by the Christian faith. For instance, it it would be no proof that Christ was equal with God; that he was in every particular perfect; that his death atoned for the sins of the world; and that his

teachings are of practical value in regulating the mundane affairs of to-day. Before we can accept such positions as furnishing any evidence of the truth of the claims of Christianity, it must be shown: (1) That the opinions of the sceptics were correct; (2) that the outlines of Christ's life are consistent and in accordance with natural law; and (3) that the portraiture given of Jesus in the four Gospels is a correct one.

In connection with this last point, it should be remembered that during the early centuries no one definite uniform opinion as to the nature and character of Christ obtained among his followers. E. P. Meredith observes that "at a most early period of the Christian era there appear to have been great doubts as to the real existence of Christ. The Manichees, as Augustine informs us, denied that he was a man, while others maintained that he was a man, but denied that he was a God (*August. Sermon*, xxxvii., c. 12). The Fathers tell us that it was, in the times of the Apostles, believed that Christ was a phantom, and that no such person as Jesus Christ had ever had any corporeal existence. There is, therefore, considerable force in the expressions of a modern writer, that the being of no other individual mentioned in history ever laboured under such a deficiency of evidence as to its reality, or ever was overset by a thousandth part of the weight of positive proof that it was a creation of imagination only, as that of Jesus Christ. His existence as a man has, from the earliest day on which it can be shown to have been asserted, been earnestly and strenuously denied; and that not by the enemies of the Christian faith, but by the most intelligent, most learned, and most sincere of the

Christian name who ever left to the world proofs of their intelligence and learning in their writings, and of their sincerity in their sufferings" (*The Prophet of Nazareth*, pp. 287–8).

Even at the present day contradictory ideas are entertained as to the real personality or character of Christ. Trinitarians believe him to be God, but the Unitarians regard him only as a man; while the Swedenborgians think him a "divine humanity." The General Baptists maintain that he died for all men, and the Particular Baptists assert that he died only for an elect number. Many of Christ's admirers look upon his character as being perfect; others admit that, being human, his character must necessarily be imperfect. Christian Socialists claim him as a great social and political reformer; but their more religious opponents aver that he was a spiritual regenerator, and that he spoke the truth when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world." In the New Testament there are clearly two portraitures given of Christ: the one, gentle and loving; the other, harsh and unforgiving. From the one come the sympathetic words: "Father, forgive them"; "Suffer little children to come unto me"; and the command, "Love one another." From the other proceed the gloomy and revengeful exclamations: "He that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God"; "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire"; "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife, etc., he cannot be my disciple." Now, the question is: As these two portraitures are diametrically opposed to each other, and given by the same authorities, which is the correct one?

In reference to the fourth position, that if Christ were not what, according to the Gospels, he professed to be, he was a victim to a fanatical self-delusion, which would indicate weakness in his moral character. The questions to be decided are: Was Christ what he claimed to be, and did he do what he promised to accomplish? Moreover, were his actions governed by reasonable modesty, or were they performed under the influence of uncontrolled enthusiasm? The New Testament is our only standard of appeal, and therein we find that the Gospels represent Christ as claiming to be equal with God, and yet he was not impervious to human weaknesses and imperfections. He suffered from hunger (Matt. iv. 2); he gave way to anger (Mark iii. 5), and to petty passion (Matt. xxi. 18, 19); he lacked power (John v. 19–30); and he was limited in wisdom (Mark xiii. 32). Further, he acknowledged that he could do nothing of himself (see John v. 19 and 30). He announced that he "proceeded forth and came from God" (John viii. 42); but he failed to justify this claim to his townsmen, for they said of him: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and Judah, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" "Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that he saith I came down from heaven?" So unpopular, however, he became at Nazareth that "all they in the synagogue rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (Mark vi. 3, John vi. 42, Luke iv. 28, 29). Even his own relatives had no faith in his pretensions to miraculous power; they accused him of secrecy, and told him to "Depart hence, and go

into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest; for there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him" (John vii. 1–5).

In moments of enthusiasm Christ made promises which he never fulfilled. In Matthew (xix.) we are told that he promised that certain of his followers should "sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel"; but there is no record that such an event ever took place. He also assured believers in him that they should "cast out devils," "take up serpents, and, if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark xvi. 17, 18). Will his followers test his promise in these matters? Moreover, he emphatically said: "If two of you shall agree upon earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 19). "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John xiv. 13, 14). Now, here Christ claims to be in a position to guarantee that the prayers of his believers shall be answered. But was he justified in so doing? Experience says, No; for, in spite of prayers asking that scepticism should cease, it increased as time rolled on, until to-day it is more extensive than it ever was. What has been more prayed for than the unity of Christendom? Jesus himself prayed that his followers might be one (John xvii. 21); yet, from his time, divisions among Christians have gone on increasing, and each sect prays in vain for the conversion of the others.

That many of the acts ascribed to Christ were of a fanatical kind is evident. For instance, his riding into Jerusalem upon an ass and a colt (Matt. xxi.); his entering the Temple, overthrowing the money-changers' tables, and whipping the merchants from the building with "a scourge of small cords" (John ii. 15); his cursing the fig-tree because it did not bear fruit out of season; his designating those who came before him as "thieves and robbers" (John x. 8), and his vituperations against certain persons, calling them "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" No wonder that his friends thought he was "beside himself" (Mark iii. 21), and that the Jews considered "he hath a devil, and is mad" (John x. 20). The Rev. Charles Voysey says Christ could "not have been God, because he was not a perfect man. He had faults which neither I nor my readers would venture to imitate without loss of self-respect. His mind gave way, and he was not responsible for what he said." Instead of regarding Jesus as an impostor, the rev. gentleman said that "he was simply mistaken, and finally insane" (*Fortnightly Review*, January, 1887). Perhaps this will account for his delusions in reference to prayer, his belief in people being possessed with devils, that believers could drink poison and suffer no injurious results, and that the world was to come to an end during the lifetime of the people of his day. Now, if fanaticism and self-delusion are fatal to moral reputation, as Professor Stewart says they are, then Christ's moral character must be impaired, for the Gospels allege that he was a victim to both these drawbacks.

What, then, does the evidence at our command in reference to the claims of and for Christ prove?

Simply this : That for many centuries contradictory and varying beliefs have obtained in connection with a person called Jesus, who is supposed to have lived nearly two thousand years ago ; that he is regarded as having been the founder of the Christian religion ; that his birth was miraculous, his life and teachings unique, his death unparalleled, and that he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. These are the fundamental claims urged on behalf of orthodox Christianity ; and we submit that there is no historical evidence sufficiently trustworthy to justify such claims. We look in vain among the writings of Jewish and heathen historians who lived in or near the time when the events are said to have happened for any testimony of their occurrence. Besides, the incidents are so contrary to human experience, and the New Testament, which records the events, is so contradictory in narrating them, that, according to the general law of evidence, the claims have no logical demand upon our credence. The fact is that the reports found in the Gospels as to when and where Christ was born, his genealogy, his sayings and doings, and his death, resurrection, and ascension, are too conflicting and inconsistent for their credibility to be relied upon. Moreover, the theories based upon the supposition that the narratives were accurate are so discordant, and have been so varying in their development, that it is difficult to conceive they were supported by fact. The Church, which accepted a theory in one age, often rejected it in another ; while views that were regarded by some Christian exponents as being orthodox have been condemned by others as heterodox. And to-day the very beliefs that were based upon the records of the New Testament are

either modified or entirely discarded, not only by secular scholars, but by learned divines. The new view entertained by "advanced Christians" is that Christ is an "ideal"; but this position is not a sound one, inasmuch as the question arises, An ideal of what? If the better parts of an ideal are marred by that which is erroneous and impracticable, the ideal is not a safe one for human guidance. That this is so in reference to the Christ of the Gospels is beyond doubt. Surely, with these facts before us, it is unreasonable to attempt to exact implicit belief in events destitute of logical coherence and of historical corroboration.

We believe that the more dignified and correct course to take, from a Rationalist point of view, is to estimate the value of the traditions that have grown up around the name of Jesus by the peculiar features belonging to the ages of their growth, and by the intellectual light of the twentieth century. Modern thought must not be fettered by ancient speculation. If it could be proved that the history of Christ were historical, it would not make the impracticable portion of his teachings useful to us; and if it could be shown that he was not what he professed to be, it would not rob any truth he taught of its real value. In this utilitarian age *what* is said should be considered of greater importance than *by whom* it is said. Personally, the origin of Christianity has but little interest for me; I am more concerned as to its truth and utility. Like all religious systems, the one bearing the Christian name is a combination of the true and the erroneous, the real and the imaginary; and our duty is to discriminate between fact and fiction, and to accept the one and to reject the other.

Neither do we consider that the admission that Jesus might have lived necessitates our regarding him either as a supernatural being or as a perfect man. Supposing he lived, he might have been self-deceived, his better judgment being overwhelmed by his fanatical nature. Christians, while admitting the existence of Buddha and Mohammed, will not grant that they were divine personages, or that their teachings were perfect. Why should a different rule be applied to Christ? His teachings are not superior to theirs, the progress of his faith has not been more extensive than theirs, and certainly his followers have not been more numerous than those of Buddha.

What, then, is the Rationalist view of Christ? It is, briefly, this: That, assuming the New Testament account of him to be accurate, we must regard him as a man who possessed but limited education, who was surrounded by unfavourable influences for intellectual acquirements, who belonged to a race not very remarkable for literary culture, who retained many of the failings of his progenitors, and who had but little regard for the world or the things of the world. Viewed under these circumstances, we can, while excusing many of his errors, recognise and admire something that is commendable in his character. But when he is raised upon a pinnacle of greatness as an exemplar of virtue and wisdom, and as surpassing the production of any age or country, he is then exalted to a position which he does not merit, and which deprives him of that credit which otherwise he would perhaps be entitled to. He revealed nothing of practical value, and he taught no virtues that were before unknown. No doubt in his life there were many excellent features; but he was far from

being perfect. While he might have been well-meaning, he was in belief superstitious, in conduct inconsistent, in opinions contradictory, in teaching arbitrary, in faith vacillating, and in pretensions great. He taught false notions of existence; he had no knowledge of science; he misled his followers by claiming to be what he was not, and he deceived himself by his own credulity. He lacked experimental force, frequently living a life of isolation, and taking but slight interest in the affairs of this world. It is this lack of experimental force throughout the career of Christ that renders his notions of domestic duties so thoroughly imperfect. As a son, he lacked affection and consideration for the feelings of his parents; as a teacher, he was mystical and rude; and as a reasoner, he was defective and illogical. Lacking a true method of reasoning, possessing no uniformity of character, he exhibited a strange example—an example injudicious to exalt and dangerous to emulate. At times he was severe when he should have been gentle. When he might have reasoned, he frequently rebuked. When he ought to have been firm and resolute, he was vacillating. When he should have been happy, he was sorrowful and despondent. After preaching faith as the one thing needful, he himself lacked it when he required it the most. Thus, on the cross, when a knowledge of a life of integrity, a sensibility of the fulfilment of a good mission, a conviction that he was dying for a noble and righteous cause, and fulfilling the object of his life—when all these should have given moral strength, we find him giving vent to utter despair. So overwhelmed was he with grief and anxiety of mind that, we are told, he "began to be sorrowful

and very heavy." "My soul," he exclaimed, "is sorrowful even unto death." At last, overcome with grief, he implores his Father to rescue him from the death which was then awaiting him.[1]

VII.—THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

The belief in the alleged resurrection of Christ is an important feature in his history. In fact, the orthodox defenders of Christianity stake the truth of their entire faith upon the reality of this one event, which is an exceedingly illogical thing to do. For, supposing Christ did rise from the dead, that would be no evidence that the whole system of orthodoxy is true and reasonable. Of course, the fallacy in this instance originated with St. Paul, who is reported to have said: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. xv. 14). "What advantageth it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." This is really the most irrational and selfish test that was ever submitted to prove the validity of any claim. It makes the usefulness of Christianity to depend not upon its ethical value, but upon a theological dogma. The utter selfishness of the test is apparent, for it puts personal gain before all considerations of general good. If all belief in the resurrection were ignored, should we then have no duties to perform, and no consolation to support us in the battle of life? Would all love for mankind and interest in their welfare cease? Should we have no hearts to gladden, no

[1] For further evidence that the orthodox view of Christ is erroneous, and that he was no great reformer, the reader is referred to the present writer's pamphlet, *Was Christ a Political and Social Reformer?* where this phase of his character is fully dealt with.

homes to make happy, and no characters to improve and elevate? The faith that makes the sunshine of existence, the recognition of duty, and the cultivation of virtue to depend upon the belief in a "risen Christ" is low and grovelling in the extreme, and it is thoroughly opposed to the Rationalist view of the nature and capabilities of the manifold energies of the human race. Fortunately, such a sordid and degrading view of life is as false as it is despairing; for, long before the story of the resurrection was heard of, the noblest virtues were fostered and the highest possible happiness was realised; and even to-day it is the same among millions of the human family where the belief does not obtain.

Although, from a Rationalist standpoint, the reality or otherwise of the resurrection of Christ has no great influence upon personal conduct, it may be interesting to inquire upon what grounds the belief in it rests. The account of such a marvellous event as the restoration from death to life of one upon whom the salvation of the world was supposed to depend should be supported by the clearest of evidence. But no such evidence exists, which is very remarkable if the event is to be considered as the strongest proof of the truth of Christianity. We have not the testimony of any eye-witnesses of the resurrection. Early historians are silent in reference to it, and the accounts in the Gospels are inconsistent and contradictory. Even the extraordinary phenomena which are said to have happened at the death of Christ (Matt. xxvii.) are not mentioned by Seneca and Pliny, although each of them, as Gibbon informs us, "in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature—earthquakes, meteors, comets, and

eclipses — which his indefatigable curiosity could collect."

As we have, then, no historical evidence of the resurrection, can any value be attached to what the New Testament says upon the subject? I have not sufficient space here to present the many contradictions contained in the Gospels as to the incidents which are reported to have occurred at the resurrection; but, if the reader will examine the accounts carefully, it will be found that the four writers differ upon the following points: The number of women who went to the sepulchre; the number of "angels" or "men" the women found there; the words spoken by the "angels" or "men"; the giving of the information of what they had seen; the persons to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection; and, finally, as to where the appearance of Christ after the resurrection took place. Such conflicting statements as are recorded in the four Gospels would not be received as evidence, even upon ordinary matters, in any of our law courts to-day. Some of these allegations *must* be false, and it is not impossible that none of them are true. Not being able to decide which is correct, we discard them all as being of no evidential value.

In Matthew (xx. 18, 19) it is recorded that Jesus said: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death; and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge him, and to crucify him, and the third day he shall rise again." Now, if these words were spoken, we may fairly suppose that such definite language would have made a deep impression upon his friends and disciples. But it does not appear to

have done anything of the kind, for, as Greg observes: "We have ample proof that *no such impression was made;* that the disciples had no conception of their Lord's approaching death—still less of his resurrection—and that, so far from their expecting either of these events, both, when they occurred, took them entirely by surprise; they were utterly confounded by the one, and could not believe the other. We find them shortly after—nay, in one instance, instantly after—these predictions were uttered, disputing which among them should be greatest in their coming dominion (Matt. xx. 24–7; Mark ix. 34–5; Luke xxii. 25, 30), glorying in the idea of thrones, and asking for seats on his right hand and on his left in his Messianic kingdom (Matt. xix. 27, 28, xx. 21; Mark x. 37; Luke xxii. 30), which, when he approached Jerusalem, they thought 'would immediately appear' (Luke xix. 11)." The four following incidents mentioned in the Gospels strongly corroborate the theory that Christ's words, that he would "rise again," had no visible effect upon some of his friends: (1) When the two women visited the sepulchre, they took sweet spices to anoint the body (Mark xvi.), which they would not have done if they expected that he would rise from the grave; (2) when Mary Magdalene discovered that the body was gone, she thought the gardener had removed it (John xx. 15), which is quite inconsistent with the belief that the resurrection had taken place; (3) when the women reported his resurrection to the disciples, "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke xxiv. 11), although it is distinctly said that Jesus told them the event would happen; (4) when he was supposed to have appeared, after his

resurrection, to the eleven disciples at Galilee, "some doubted" (Matt. xxviii. 17), while others thought that "they had seen a spirit" (Luke xxiv. 37). So sceptical were certain of the disciples about the "risen Christ" that it is reported that he "upbraided them with their unbelief" (Mark xvi. 14).

With these Gospel admissions that the story of the resurrection was not accepted as true by many of those who lived at the time it is said to have occurred, of what value is the assertion that the event gained universal assent? Why, not only did some of the Christians disbelieve the story after all possible evidence had been produced (1 Cor. xv. 12), but the great body of the Jews and the Romans had no faith in its truth. The fact that the Jewish Sanhedrim, composed of educated Jews, and the six Roman governors, mentioned in the New Testament, who had every opportunity of judging of the genuineness or otherwise of the story, refused to believe in it, is evidence of its doubtful character. Besides, according to Mosheim, many of the early Christians thought that Christ was not crucified, but that it was Judas; and it was not until the second century, says Charles B. Waite, M.A., in his *History of the Christian Religion*, that "the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, in a material body, appeared." It is evident that the writer of Matthew's Gospel did not pretend to record contemporary events, for he writes: "This saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (xxviii. 15).

The case stands thus: The resurrection itself would have been an extraordinary event, one contrary to known natural law, and opposed to all human experience. In its favour we have no testimony either of

eye-witnesses or of historians who lived at or near the time Christ is alleged to have risen. The accounts given by the writers of the Gospels upon the subject are too contradictory to be received as evidence; many of the people who, it is said, had been informed that Christ would rise had no idea that he had risen, while some of the most learned men of the period disbelieved the story. These facts afford abundant evidence that the resurrection is not a demonstrated truth.

Now, let us briefly consider the reasons given by Christian exponents in favour of the belief in this—to say the least—improbable and uncorroborated story, which, be it remembered, originated in an ignorant, uncritical, and superstitious age. In the first place, it is contended that, unless we accept the Christian account of the origin and perpetuation of the belief in the resurrection of Christ, we are bound to furnish a better one. Logically, we are not compelled to do anything of the kind; all that really devolves upon those who cannot accept the story is to examine the case for the affirmation, and to show that the reasons given are insufficient to establish the truth of what is affirmed. Christians deny many of the pretensions of Buddha and Mohammed, and they disbelieve the stories of the resurrection of Chrishna, of Adonis, of Osiris, and of many other ancient "saviours," in whom thousands of sincere devotees have believed. But these very Christians do not deem it their duty to explain how the faith in the miraculous birth, death, and resurrection of these religious heroes originated, and how it was perpetuated. Why, then, are we expected to account for the belief in such an unlikely event as the resurrection of Christ? Superstitions of various

kinds, such as the belief in the miracles of the Catholic Church, in the story of the approaching end of the world, etc., have always been found allied with ignorance and duplicity. These factors, no doubt, played an important part in the origination of the belief that Christ rose from the dead.

While it is not necessary that we should furnish a better reason for the existence of the belief in the resurrection than the one supplied by Christianity, the following probable causes may be assigned: (1) The expectation, based upon Christ's reported prediction, that he would rise again. It is true his words failed to impress some, but others of more weak and credulous natures were affected by what he was supposed to have said. (2) The revolt of the Jews against the Roman power which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem. This, no doubt, induced many of Christ's disciples to think that the end of the world was at hand, in accordance with his predictions (Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii., Luke xxi.), and that he was coming to establish his kingdom, in which they were to be governors (Matt. xix. 28). That they were deceived would not alter the fact that these events tended to justify, to their minds, the delusion in which they believed. (3) Because the disciples suffered from persecution which they might have mistaken for the fulfilment of another of their Master's prophecies (Matt. xxiv. 9). These three circumstances were calculated to encourage the idea in credulous minds that Christ had been restored to life, and that he would be with them again. Of course, they were disappointed, as the second coming of Jesus was no more a reality than was his resurrection. Besides, resurrections were believed in long before Christ's time. Ovid's

prophecy in reference to Æsculapius was very similar to what has been said about Christ. Here are the words :—

> "Once, as the sacred infant she surveyed,
> The God was kindled in the raving maid;
> And thus she uttered her prophetic tale:
> Hail, great physician of the world! all hail!
> Hail, mighty infant, who in years to come
> Shall heal the nations and defraud the tomb.
> Swift be thy growth, thy triumphs unconfined;
> Make kingdoms thicker and increase mankind.
> Thy daring heart shall animate the dead,
> And draw the thunder on thy guilty head;
> Then shalt thou die, but from the dark abode
> Shalt rise victorious and be twice a God."

The belief in the resurrection has been perpetuated principally through persons accepting the faith without investigation. This has been the cause of the growth of nearly all the superstitions in the world. The fact that the belief in a personal devil, a burning hell, purgatory, and in the efficacy of prayers has been retained so long is to be attributed to the lack of free inquiry upon the part of those who have accepted these theological dogmas. The same with the belief in the resurrection. How many of those who regard it as a fact to-day have sought to ascertain what evidence it has in its support? Even the majority of ministers who preach this doctrine can give no other reason for believing in it than because they find that it is taught in a certain book; and most of the laity who endorse the belief that Christ rose from the dead are influenced by the delusion that heaven will be the reward of all who accept the belief, and that hell will be the portion of those who reject it. Even St. Paul, who is the principal witness for the resurrection, believed it

on trust and faith, "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4). He also thought that the end of the world would arrive in the time in which he lived, but he was mistaken. Why, then, should he be relied upon in reference to the resurrection? The supposed evidence of St. Paul is worthless to prove that Christ rose from the dead. He was not an eye-witness of the event, and his references to it are most misleading. For instance, he says, Christ "was seen of the twelve," but Judas was dead (Matt. xxvii. 3–5), and Matthias was not chosen until after the Ascension (Acts i. 26). Then we are told "he was seen of above five hundred brethren"; yet not one of the five hundred has left the testimony that "I saw Jesus." "Last of all," says St. Paul, "he was seen of me." But how did he see him? Let the Apostle answer for himself: "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth), such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth)" (2 Cor. xii. 1–3).

Some of the Spiritualists to-day profess to have "visions and revelations"; but most rational minds do not accept such "visions and revelations" as matters of fact, to be depended upon to prove anything of importance. Moreover, St. Paul's idea of a resurrection was that it would be a spiritual one; and he says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. xv. 50); but the alleged resurrection of Christ was of his natural body, and after he had risen we are told he ate broiled fish just before he ascended "up into heaven" (Luke xxiv.).

Professor Stewart says: "The existence of the Church, and especially the early institution of the Lord's Day and of Easter Day, are proofs of the nature and strength of primitive belief as to the resurrection." In answer to this, it may be stated that the resurrection was not a recognised doctrine of the Church until the second century. But suppose it were, it would not follow that, because the Church believed it, therefore it was true. The Roman Catholics dedicated their Church to the "Holy Virgin"; but is that evidence that Mary, who was the mother of many children, was a virgin? As to the term "Lord's Day," the Professor ought to know that it has no reference to the day when Christ is said to have risen. Many conflicting opinions have been given as to its real meaning. It has been thought to refer to the "Gospel dispensation," to the "Day of Judgment," to the "first day of the week"; but, so far as it can be applied to anything, it is to the Bible Sabbath, which is Saturday, the seventh day of the week, and this was not the day of the supposed resurrection.

In reference to Easter, that was of pagan origin, and in *Chambers's Encyclopædia* (article "Easter") it is said: "With her usual policy, the Church endeavoured to give a Christian significance to such of the rites as could not be rooted out; and in this case the conversion was practically easy." Christian exponents have a reckless habit of connecting certain events together as if they bore the relation to each other of cause and effect, when, in reality, there is no such relation between them. To claim that the resurrection was a fact because the Church believed it, and because the "Lord's Day" and Easter have become

recognised institutions, is the very height of theological assumption. There is not a shadow of legitimate evidence to support such a claim.

VIII.—THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

Probably no one who has marked the development of religious thought will deny that Christianity has been a potent factor in the history of the world. Its nature, incentive, and general environment would naturally make it so. Nothing influences the theological mind, either for good or for evil, more than the notion of supernaturalism. If a person is induced to have absolute faith in the fatherhood and sovereignty of God, he deems it his first duty to carry out that which he considers to be the will of that God. Hence it is that during intellectual periods men's notions of Deity have been refined and cultivated, and, as a consequence, oppression and persecution of scepticism have been more rare; while, on the other hand, when the multitude held rude ideas of divinity, minds pure and chaste were sickened at the scenes of cruelty and bloodshed which were enacted in accordance with what was supposed to be "the will of God."[1]

The question here is: Are the claims put forward by Christian exponents as to the influence of Christianity upon personal character and natural progress borne out by individual experience and the records of history? As a rule, man is supposed to know himself better than others know him; but there are instances in which other people can estimate a person more

[1] For further information bearing upon this point the reader is referred to Buckle's *History of Civilisation.*

correctly than he can estimate himself. They will take a more dispassionate view of his character. They will be in a better position to compare him with others, and can thus judge more accurately of his relations and comparative place in the scale of humanity. As with individuals so it is with systems of religions. The devotees of a certain faith are wont to regard it as being spotless, and as containing the panacea for all the imperfections of society. This is particularly the case with Christian advocates, who not only ignore all that is evil and defective in the world as being apart from their system, but they credit Christianity with all the progress that has taken place in modern times. This is simply a theological assumption utterly opposed to the true history of all human improvement. The progress of a nation cannot be attributed to any one thing or to any one period, but rather to a combination of circumstances which have been in operation during many ages. For instance, had it not been for the scientific discoveries in the eighteenth century of a Watt, a Dalton, and others, the sciences with which their names are associated would not have been so easy of application to human utility as they are at the present time. It is equally true that for the freedom from religious intolerance which we now enjoy we are as much indebted to Franklin, Paine, Carlile, Hetherington, Watson, and other Freethought heroes of the past, as to any of their representatives of this generation. To judge fairly of the influence of Christianity, the following facts should be kept in view:—

(1) That it is not an original system of harmonious teachings and of uniform history. No one who has carefully and impartially read the histories of the ancient religions and ethical systems can truly allege

that the principal doctrines and moral teachings of the New Testament were known for the first time in their connection with Christianity. The able American writer, Charles B. Waite, M.A., in his *History of the Christian Religion*, observes: "Many of the more prominent doctrines of the Christian religion prevailed among nations of antiquity hundreds —and in some instances thousands—of years before Christ." Judge Strange, in his work, *The Sources and Development of Christianity*, shows that nearly all the Christian doctrines—the Atonement, Trinity, Incarnation, Judgment of the Dead, Immortality, Sacrifice—were of Egyptian origin, and, therefore, existed long before the time of Christ. The same writer, on p. 100 of the work mentioned, says: "Christianity, it is thus apparent, was not the result of a special revelation from above, but the growth of circumstances, and developed out of the materials, working in a natural manner in the human mind in the place and at the time that the movement occurred." "To the truths already uttered in the Athenian prison," remarks Mackay, "Christianity added little or nothing, except a few symbols, which, though well calculated for popular acceptance, are more likely to perplex than to instruct, and offer the best opportunity for priestly mystification." Sir William Jones, in his tenth discourse before the Asiatic Society, says: "Christianity has no need of such aids as many are willing to give it, by asserting that the wisest men of the world were ignorant of the great maxim, that we should act in respect to others as we would wish them to act in respect of ourselves, as the rule is implied in a speech of Lysias, expressed in distinct phrases by Thales and Pittacus, and I have seen it word for word

in the original of Confucius." And the Rev. Dr. George Matheson, in his lecture on *The Religions of China*, p. 84, frankly states: "The glory of Christian morality is that it is not original."

(2) To say professed Christians have often performed noble and useful actions is not sufficient to make good the orthodox claims; it must be shown that such actions accord with the teachings of the New Testament. It does not follow that, because Christianity and civilisation co-exist, the former is the cause of the latter. Scepticism now obtains more than at any previous period; but Christians will not grant that modern progress is the result of unbelief. Civilisation is not an invention, but a growth; a process from low animal conditions to higher physical, moral, and intellectual attainments. The real value of civilisation consists in its being the means whereby the community can enjoy personal comfort and general happiness. History teaches that the progress of a people depends upon their knowledge of, and their obedience to, organic laws. The principal causes of modern civilisation are: The development of the intellect—this rules the world to-day; the expansion of mechanical genius—this provides for the increased needs of the people; the extension of national commerce—this causes an interchange of ideas; the invention of printing—this provides for the circulation of newly-discovered facts; the beneficial influence of climate—this affects the condition both of body and mind; the knowledge and the application of science —these reveal the value and the power of natural resources; the spread of scepticism—this provides for the vindication of the right of mental freedom; the practical recognition of political justice—this

forms the basis of all just Governments; and, finally, the establishment of the social equality of women with men—this secures the emancipation of women from that state of domestic servitude and general inferiority in which theology had for centuries kept them. Now, not one of these civilising elements is to be found in the teachings of the New Testament; but, on the contrary, much that is taught therein discourages a progressive spirit (see Matt. vi. 25–34, xix. 21, 29; Luke xiv. 26; John vi. 27, xii. 25; 1 Cor. vii. 20; Romans xiii. 1, 2; Eph. v. 22–24; and 1 Peter ii. 13–18).

(3) The personal results of Christianity have depended upon the nature and characteristics of those who accepted it as a belief. Hence persons of the most varied dispositions and the most opposite natures have been its illustrators, expounders, and living representatives. It has found room for all temperaments—the ascetic and the luxurious enjoyer of life; the man of action and the man of contemplation; the monk and the king; the philanthropist and the destroyer of his race; the iconoclastic hater of all ceremonies and the superstitious devotee. It has been, in the words of St. Paul, "all things to all men." This heterogeneous influence upon the human character, however, is by no means the result of any all-embracing comprehensiveness in Christianity, but is rather the effect of a system characterised alike by its indefinite, incomplete, and undecisive principles. This fact explains why some men have been good in spite of their being believers in the orthodox faith, while other believers have been destitute of the nobler qualities of human nature. The power that "makes for righteousness" came not from Christianity, but

from the natural proclivities of its professors. If this were not so, we might justly expect that all the recipients of the faith would have been influenced for good. That they were not thus influenced we learn from the New Testament and Christian history. "Contentions," "strife," "indignation," "fraud," and deceit were indulged in by St. Paul and his contemporaries (see Acts xv. 39; Luke xxii. 24; Matt. xx. 24; 1 Cor. vi. 8; Matt. xxvi. 70, 72; 2 Cor. xi. 8 and xii. 16). Mosheim admits that in the fourth century "the Church was contaminated with shoals of profligate Christians.....It cannot be affirmed that even true Christians were entirely innocent and irreproachable in this matter" (see Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. i., pp. 55, 77, 102, 193). Salvian, an eminent pious clergyman of the fifth century, writes: "With the exception of a very few who flee from vice, what is almost every Christian congregation but a sink of vices? For you will find in the Church scarcely one who is not either a drunkard, a glutton, or an adulterer.....or a robber, or a manslayer, and, what is worse than all, almost all these without limit" (Miall's *Memorials of Early Christianity*, p. 366). Dr. Cave, in his *Primitive Christianity* (p. 2), observes: "If a modest and honest heathen were to estimate Christianity by the lives of its professors, he would certainly proscribe it as the vilest religion in the world." Dr. Dicks, in his *Philosophy of Religion* (pp. 366–7), also states: "There is nothing which so strikingly marks the character of the Christian world in general as the want of candour [and the existence of] the spirit of jealousy.....Slander, dishonesty, falsehood, and cheating are far from being uncommon among those who profess to be united in the bonds of

a common Christianity." Wesley, after stating that "Bible-reading England" was guilty of every species of vice, even of those that nature itself abhors, thus concludes: "Such a complication of villainies of every kind, considered with all their aggravations; such a scorn of whatever bears the face of virtue; such injustice, fraud, and falsehood; above all, such perjury and such a method of law, we may defy the whole world to produce" (*Sermons*, vol. xii., p. 223).

It is not true that, as orthodox believers allege, Christianity is a universal religion. Christ states that he was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 24). And when he sent his disciples forth to preach he commanded them to "go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matt. x. 5). Besides, the very nature of the faith precludes it from being suitable to all the nations of the world. Hence it has always been subject to human conditions and national environments, and, when such factors were unfavourable to its advancement, it either made comparatively no progress, or its exponents altered its form that it might be adapted to the conditions by which it was surrounded. Of this fact there is abundant testimony. Tennant, in his *Christianity in Ceylon*, says: "Neither history nor more recent experience can furnish any example of the long retention of pure Christianity by a people themselves rude and unenlightened. In all the nations of Europe, embracing every period since the second century, Christianity must be regarded as having taken the hue and complexion of the social state with which it was incorporated, presenting itself unsullied, contaminated, or corrupted, in sympathy

with the enlightenment, or ignorance, or debasement of those by whom it had been originally embraced. The rapid and universal degeneracy of the early Asiatic Churches is associated with the decline of education and the intellectual decay of the communities among whom they were established." Dean Milman, in his *History of Civilisation*, observes: "Its [Christianity's] specific character will almost entirely depend upon the character of the people who are its votaries.....it will darken with the darkness and brighten with the light of each succeeding century." Lord Macaulay says, with no less truth than brilliancy: "Christianity conquered Paganism, but Paganism infected Christianity. The rites of the Pantheon passed into her worship, and the subtleties of the Academy into her creed." Francis William Newman, in his *Phases of Faith*, also remarks: "I at length saw how untenable is the argument drawn from the inward history of Christianity in favour of its superhuman origin. In fact, this religion cannot pretend to self-sustaining power. Hardly was it started on its course when it began to be polluted by the heathenism and false philosophy around it. With the decline of national genius and civil culture it became more and more debased. So far from being able to uphold the existing morality of the best Pagan teachers, it became barbarised itself, and sank into deep superstition and manifold moral corruption. From ferocious men it learned ferocity. When civil society began to coalesce into order, Christianity also turned for the better, and presently learned to use the wisdom, first of Romans, then of Greeks; such studies opened men's eyes to new apprehensions of the Scripture and of its doctrine. By gradual and human means, Europe, like ancient

Greece, grew up towards better political institutions, and Christianity improved with them."

With these historical facts at their command, it is strange that Christian writers should put forward, as they do, such extravagant and groundless claims on behalf of their faith. Professor Stewart has the temerity to claim, in his *Handbook of Christian Evidences*, the following as achievements of Christianity: (1) The introduction of the spirit of humanity and the doctrine of brotherhood of man; (2) the modern elevation of woman; (3) the abolition of slavery; (4) the extinction of the gladiatorial combats in Rome; (5) the establishment of hospitals; and (6) the fostering of art and general culture. These are some of the advantages for which it is said we are indebted to the influence of Christianity. A greater perversion of facts we have seldom encountered, as we purpose now to show.

(1) The great principle of love, humanity, and the brotherhood of man was understood and practised long before Christianity existed. "Love," says the great teacher of the Academy, "is peace and goodwill among men, calm upon the waters, repose and stillness in the storm, and balm of sleep in sadness." "Independently of Christian revelation," says Merivale, "the heathen world was gravitating, through natural causes, towards the acknowledgment of the cardinal doctrines of humanity" (*Conversion of the Roman Empire*, p. 118). In Mencius we have the noble statement that "Humanity is the heart of man." Lecky writes: "The duty of humanity to slaves had been at all times one of those which the philosophers had most ardently inculcated.....But these exhortations [on the duty of abstaining from cruelty to slaves], in

which some have imagined that they have discovered the influence of Christianity, were, in fact, simply an echo of the teaching of ancient Greece, and especially of Zeno, the founder of the sect who had laid down, *long before the dawn of Christianity* [italics are mine], the broad principle that all men are by nature equal, and that virtue alone establishes a difference between them" (*History of European Morals*, vol. i., pp. 324–5; see *The Sacred Anthology*, by Moncure D. Conway, pp. 10 and 354). Lecky also states that "the doctrine of the brotherhood of mankind" was an active factor in Rome, and that "Cicero asserted it as emphatically as Seneca" (*ibid.*, p. 361). Christ's idea of brotherhood was an exceedingly limited one, inasmuch as it was confined to those who believed in him. Even at the "judgment day" mankind are to be divided, "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from his goats" (see Luke xii. 9; Matt. xxv. 32).

(2) The position of woman, according to the Bible, is low and humiliating in the extreme. It teaches that "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. iii. 16). It enjoins that, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Eph. v. 22–24). Women are not to speak in public, but to be under obedience, as also saith the law; they are not permitted to teach, but to learn in silence with all subjection, for the reason that "Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression" (1 Tim. ii. 11, 15). These notions are not, when accepted, calculated to elevate the character or better the condition of woman. Herbert Spencer says: "In England, as late as the seventeenth century, husbands of decent

station were not ashamed to beat their wives. Gentlemen arranged parties of pleasure for the purpose of seeing wretched women whipped at Bridewell. It was not until 1817 that the public whipping of women was abolished in England. Wives in England were bought from the fifth to the seventeenth century." Contrast this with the treatment of woman before the advent of Christianity. Lecky says: "The Roman religion was essentially domestic, and it was the main object of the legislator to surround marriage with every circumstance of dignity and solemnity. Monogamy was, from the earliest times, strictly enjoined, and it was one of the great benefits that have resulted from the expansion of the Roman power that it made this type dominant in Europe. In the legends of early Rome we have ample evidence of the high moral estimate of women, and of their prominence in Roman life. The tragedies of Lucretia and of Virginia display a delicacy of honour, a sense of supreme excellence, of unsullied purity, which no Christian nation could surpass" (*European Morals*, vol. ii., p. 316). "The legal position of the wife had become one of complete independence, while her social position was one of great dignity" (*ibid.*, p. 323). Sir Henry Maine, in his *Ancient Law*, says: "No society which preserves any tincture of Christian institutions is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the middle Roman law. .....The later Roman law having assumed, on the theory of natural law, the equality of the sexes, control of the person of the woman was quite obsolete when Christianity was born. Her situation had become one of great personal liberty and proprietary independence, even when married, and the arbitrary power over her

of her male relatives, or her guardian, was reduced to a nullity; while the form of marriage conferred on the husband no superiority.....But Christianity tended from the first to narrow this remarkable liberty."[1]

(3) No one questions that slavery is sanctioned in the Bible. But the damaging fact to Professor Stewart's contention is that, although at the time when Christ is supposed to have lived the horrors of slavery existed on every hand, he was silent upon this great evil. In fact, slavery is endorsed in the New Testament, for we read: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters as worthy of all honour." "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters." "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling." "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear: not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Tim. vi. 1; Titus ii. 9; Eph. vi. 5; 1 Peter ii. 18). While the humanity of many professed Christians prompted them to oppose slavery, among the most persistent upholders of slavery and the most determined opponents to its abolition were Christians, not only of this country, but also of nearly all the American denominations. It is stated in *The Life and Times of Garrison* that at an American convention held in May, 1841, he

[1] For ample evidence, showing the unjust laws which Christian Councils passed, that were degrading to woman, and also the treatment she received from the Christian Fathers, the reader is referred to a very able book, *Woman, Church, and State* (chapters vii. and ix.), by Matilda J. Gage; also to *Men, Women, and Gods*, by Helen H. Gardener, and *The Religion of Woman*, by Joseph McCabe. In these works ample evidence is given to disprove the allegation that woman owes her improved condition to Christianity.

proposed: "That, among the responsible classes in the non-slaveholding States, in regard to the existence of slavery the religious professors, and especially the clergy, stand wickedly pre-eminent, and ought to be unsparingly exposed and reproved before all the people." Theodore Parker said that, if the whole American Church had "dropped through the Continent and disappeared altogether, the anti-slavery cause would have been further on" (*Works*, vol. vi., p. 333). He pointed out that no Church ever issued a single tract among all its thousands against property in human flesh and blood, and 80,000 slaves were owned by Presbyterians, 225,000 by Baptists, and 250,000 by Methodists. Even Wilberforce himself declared that the American Episcopal Church "raises no voice against the predominant evil; she palliates it in theory, and in practice she shares in it. The mildest and most conscientious of the bishops of the South are slaveholders themselves."

Neither did Christianity improve the position of the slaves, for both Lecky and Gibbon have shown that the condition of slaves was, in some instances, better before than it was after the introduction of Christianity. Prior to Christianity many of the slaves had political power; they were educated, and allowed to mix in the domestic circles of their masters. Lecky observes: "The physician who tended the Roman in his sickness, the tutor to whom he confided the education of his son, the artists whose services commanded the admiration of the city, were usually slaves. Slaves sometimes mixed with their masters in the family, ate habitually with them at the same table, and were regarded by them with the warmest affection" (Lecky's *History of Morals*, vol. i., pp. 323 and 327).

The Council of Laodicea actually interdicted slaves from Church communion without the consent of their masters. The Council of Orleans (541) ordered that the descendants of slave parents might be captured and replaced in the servile condition of their ancestors. The Council of Toledo (633) forbade Bishops to liberate slaves belonging to the Church. Jews having made fortunes by slave-dealing, the Councils of Rheims and Toledo both prohibited the selling of Christian slaves except to Christians. Parker Pillsbury's excellent work, *Acts of the Anti-Slavery Apostles*, is a strong indictment of the Christian Church for its conduct in supporting slavery.

(4) It is not true that the Galilean faith removed the blots that dimmed the glory of the ancient world. Slavery, infanticide, and brutal sports remained for centuries after the erection of the symbol of the Cross. It is true that Rome, like every other country, had its vices; but Christianity failed to remove them. As Lecky observes, "the golden age of Roman law was not Christian, but Pagan" (*History of European Morals*, vol. ii., p. 44). The gladiatorial shows of Rome had a religious origin; and, while some of the grandest pagan writers condemned them, they were not abolished till four hundred years after the commencement of the Christian era. And be it observed that the immediate cause of their ultimately being stopped was that at one of the exhibitions, in A.D. 404, a monk was killed. "His death," says Lecky, "led to the final abolition of the games" (*ibid.*, p. 40). It was a noteworthy fact that, while the passion for these games existed in Rome, its love for religious liberty was equally as strong; and it was this very liberty that was first destroyed in the Christian Empire

(*ibid.*, p. 38). Every nation has had its national drawback, and Christian countries are no exception to the general rule. Under the very shadow of the Cross cruelties of the deepest dye have been practised. Bull-fights, badger-hunting, cock-fighting, and pigeon-shooting have all been, and still are, favourite amusements in some Christian lands. What was the state of morals in England during the reigns of Henry VIII., Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and George IV.? Was there ever a period of greater moral depravity and intellectual poverty than when the Christian Church was paramount and supreme, when the saints, the bishops, and the priests were guilty of the worst of crimes, including incest, adultery, and concubinage, when "sacred institutions," filled with pious nuns, were converted into brothels and hot-beds of infanticide? (*ibid.*, 351). Rome, with all its immorality, will bear comparison with the early ages of Christianity.

(5) There is no lack of evidence to prove that consideration for the poor and the sick existed centuries before the Christian era. Such virtue is confined to no one race, and to no one religion. According to Prescott, the ancient Mexicans had hospitals in the principal cities "for the cure of the sick, and for the permanent refuge of disabled soldiers" (*History of the Conquest of Mexico*, p. 140). Hospitals are evidently the outgrowth of dispensaries, and we are told that, as far back as the eleventh century B.C., the Egyptians had medical officers who were paid by the State, and who attended in some public place to prescribe for the sick who came there. These were qualified men; for at this early date there was a College of Physicians, and only those who were

licensed by this College were allowed to practise. R. Bosworth Smith, M.A., writes in his *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*: "No Christian need be sorry to learn, or be backward to acknowledge, that, contrary to what is usually supposed, two of these noble institutions [hospitals and lunatic asylums].....owe their origin and their early spread, not to his own religion, but to the great heart of humanity, which beats in two other of the grandest religions of the world. Hospitals are the direct outcome of Buddhism" (p. 253). About 325 B.C. King Asoka commanded his people to build hospitals for the poor, the sick, and distressed, at each of the four gates of Patna and throughout his dominions. The first Christian hospital was built by a Roman lady named Fabiola, in the fourth century A.D., so that it took some time for Christianity to begin to develop this good fruit, though Egyptians, Greeks, and Hindoos had long before shown the value of it. If it were true that the world is indebted to Christianity for benevolent institutions, it would be a sad reproach to the supposed "Heavenly Father," who, until less than two thousand years ago, failed to inspire his children with active sympathy for those who required help. Were "God's chosen people" destitute of love and consideration for their fellows? Let the old Testament answer the question.

(6) No doubt, Christianity at one period gave an impetus to art, and so it did to monkish lying chronicles. William Hole, R.S.A., however, says: "Christianity brought about the deterioration of Greek art.....In early centuries Christianity tended generally to the decay of art. When it did favour it, it was not through love of art, but for the sake of

religion" (Address delivered before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute, February 16th, 1892).

The assistance that culture has received from Christian teachings is of a very doubtful character. Where in the New Testament is education inculcated? We know that the Christian Church destroyed much of the learning of Rome, and plunged Europe into a state of mental darkness. For centuries it monopolised, with a blighting force, the agencies of intellectual training, with the result that the world was cursed with what Lecky terms "a night of mental and moral darkness," and he further adds: "Nearly all the greatest intellectual achievements of the last three centuries have been preceded and prepared by the growth of scepticism.....The splendid discoveries of physical science would have been impossible but for the scientific scepticisms of the school of Bacon..... Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities, not till Mohammedan science and classical Freethought and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church, did the intellectual revival of Europe begin" (*History of Morals*, vol. ii., pp. 205 and 219).

Books recommended to students of the subjects discussed in this essay:—

Buckle's *History of Civilisation.* Especially chapters iv.–vii.

Professor Huxley's *Controverted Questions;* and his reference to Miracles in his *Life of Hume.*

Laing's *Modern Science and Modern Thought, Problems of the Future,* and *Human Origins.*

Sir Leslie Stephen's *An Agnostic's Apology.*

J. S. Mill's *On Liberty.*

Schmidt's *Social Aspects of Early Christianity.*
Draper's *Conflict between Religion and Science.*
J. Cotter Morison's *The Service of Man.*
William Addis's *Christianity in the Roman Empire.*
Herbert Spencer's *First Principles.*
W. R. Greg's *The Creed of Christendom.*
Charles Bradlaugh's *Genesis.*
Evan Powell Meredith's *The Prophet of Nazareth.*
Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History.*
Dr. Giles's *Hebrew and Christian Records.*
Dr. Irons's *The Bible and its Interpreters.*
Rev. S. Davidson's *The Canon of the Bible.*
Professor Graham's *The Creed of Science.*
Karl Pearson's *The Grammar of Science.*
Lecky's *History of European Morals.* 2 vols.
Charles Watts's *Was Christ a Political and Social Reformer?*
Constance E. Plumptre's *Natural Causation.*

WHAT IS AGNOSTICISM?

ALTHOUGH the term "Agnosticism" is comparatively new, that which it represents is as old as humanity. Men are not now for the first time discovering that there are questions which lie altogether beyond their gnosis or knowledge. That discovery was made at the dawn of human thought. A knowledge of his own ignorance was one of the qualities which Socrates boasted that he possessed, and which distinguished him in such a marked manner from his wily antagonists, the Sophists; and at Athens, two thousand years ago, St. Paul is said to have found an altar, the remaining one of many, dedicated to an "Unknown God." The limits of human knowledge have been recognised by the foremost men of the race in all lands and in every age. Before the mighty mysteries of the universe the greatest thinkers have stood, wondering, aghast, and dumb. The intellect has again and again been paralysed in its ineffectual attempts to read the riddles of existence, before which that of the Sphinx seems almost insignificant; and no Œdipus has yet been found competent to the task of furnishing the solution.

What is Agnosticism? The word is one that has become tolerably familiar to a large section of society in sound, if not in its strictest philosophical signification. Friends and foes alike employ it—the former

to approve it and the latter to condemn it, and both to describe a certain phase of thought which is recognised as being very extensive. Like most technical phrases, the term is derived from the Greek, and signifies "not knowing." An Agnostic, therefore, is one who confesses that he has no knowledge upon those subjects to which his Agnosticism is applicable. It should be distinctly understood that Agnosticism is not to be in any way confounded with ignorance, as that word is used in every-day life. Herein consists one of the errors into which our orthodox opponents are continually falling. They use the words "Agnosticism" and "general ignorance" as if they were synonymous, which is misleading, to say the least of it—that is, unless the latter term be employed as the direct antithesis of omniscience. No one pretends to know everything, and the knowledge of many persons is considerably less than they in their own opinion imagine. The fault of over-estimating our own knowledge is very common, and frequently begets an egotism of a very dangerous nature. Invariably, the less a man knows the more dogmatic he becomes; and the weaker the evidence upon which his convictions are, based the more positively will he assert them to be true. It should require no extensive self-examination to convince the careful thinker that, even if he knew all that can be known upon every subject within the range of human gnosis, still then the domain into which his knowledge did not extend would be infinitely large compared with that small sphere which his information has covered. In that larger province he is an Agnostic, and it would be very unfair to designate him an ignorant person on that account. Therefore, although

Agnosticism means "not knowing," it is in no way the equivalent of general ignorance.

The word "Agnostic," however, in its philosophical sense, has a still broader meaning. An Agnostic is not simply a person who is professedly ignorant concerning many subjects upon which other persons pretend to have an extensive knowledge; he also maintains that there are problems the solution of which by man is impossible at the present stage of his mental development. Further, an Agnostic is one who limits the human mind by the measure of its capacity. That the finite can never become infinite is probably a matter about which there can be no difference of opinion, inasmuch as such a statement is a self-evident truth. On the other hand, a mind which is less than infinite cannot possess all knowledge. The consequence is that there must always remain a wide field beyond the range of the human faculties. In relation to that field every man must be Agnostic, for the simple reason that his knowledge cannot penetrate therein. Even the most orthodox believer proclaims his Agnosticism, in a sense—that is, he admits that there are subjects which he not only does not know, but which, from their very nature, he can never know, since they relate to that which lies outside the sphere of thought. As Herbert Spencer observes: "At the utmost reach of discovery there arises, and must ever arise, the question, What lies beyond?" *(First Principles)*. And that beyond does not diminish, but rather widens, as knowledge increases; for the more we know, the more we discover we have to learn. "The power which the universe manifests to us," remarks the same writer, "is utterly inscrutable." Why should there be any hesitation in

admitting this truth? Man does not look upon it as derogatory to human nature to admit that his power is limited, and that there are things which he cannot do. Why, therefore, should it be considered humiliating to confess that man's *knowledge* is limited, and that there are topics which he does not and cannot know? Not simply that he has not advanced sufficiently in intellectual research to grapple with them, but that they lie completely outside his sphere of thought. In nature we can never know more than phenomena; and yet these very phenomena involve the necessity of the existence of something which is their ground and support—that something being to us unknowable. The unknown is postulated in the very terms we are compelled to use when speaking of the unknown. "The senses," as Lewes observes, "perceive only phenomena; never noumena" *(History of Philosophy)*. This opinion is not of modern origin, since Anaxagoras maintained it, and Plato gave it his support. Thus it will be seen that Agnosticism is not only not synonymous with what is generally termed ignorance, but it is compatible with the very highest and most profound knowledge of which the human mind is capable.

Agnosticism, being a philosophical, or certainly a quasi-philosophical, question, must be judged of in the same manner as any other subject of philosophy. Dogmatism is out of place in regard to it, and those who accept its teachings must be content to practise humility and to lay aside all arrogant assumptions of their great superiority to other men whose views may not be identical with their own. As an ancient philosopher observed: "We are never more in danger of being subdued than when we think ourselves invincible."

The object of the whole Agnostic system is to learn, as far as possible, the limits of the human mind in reference to the acquisition of knowledge, and, having done this, to use every possible effort to effect improvement, and to leave the useless and impracticable labour of sowing the wind to those who would seek to know the unknowable and to perform the impossible. Agnostics, refusing to profess a knowledge they cannot command, aim to differentiate the knowable from the unknowable, and then devote their time and energies to widening the sphere of that within human gnosis. Whatever else is possible, it is certain that we can never extend the domain of the known into the unknown by indulging in wild flights of the imagination respecting the unknowable.

Agnosticism maintains that the teachings of theology relative to the origin and nature of the universe, the existence of God, and immortality are simply questions of speculation, and that reason, science, and general knowledge do not support their dogmatic claims. For instance, the question of the origin of the universe is to us involved in *absolute mystery*. Not only can it not be fathomed by the human mind, but no approach even can be made towards the solution of the problem by the mightiest efforts of the human intellect. We may go back millions of years in imagination, but then we are no nearer to an understanding than we were before. Indeed, the possibility of a beginning of the universe at all cannot be thought—in other words, it is not thinkable. As Mansel observes, "Creation is, to the human mind, inconceivable." It is precisely the same with the other alternative, of an external existence, whether of matter or spirit. It presents no idea that we can deal with

intellectually, because it resembles nothing of which we have had, or can have, the smallest possible experience. Something must have existed from all eternity; that is a necessary truth, from which there is no escape. And yet the how of that eternal existence lies utterly beyond the sphere of human thought. To waste time in trying to comprehend it, to say nothing of making it the subject of discussion, much less of dogmatism, is the supremest folly. Nor can we have the slightest idea as to what was, or is, the eternal existence. The dogmatic Theist ascribes it to God, and the positive Atheist declares it to be matter; but what in reality either the one or the other means, in the strictest sense, by the terms used, neither of them knows. For what is God, and what is matter? Are they the same, or are they two different existences? The Materialist, of course, denies the existence of spirit, and hence by matter he means something other than spirit; but what? Matter is simply a name given to that which originates in us sensations. But all that is known of this is phenomenal, and phenomena, as before pointed out, cannot exist by themselves, but must be supported by something which underlies them. What that something is, however, no one knows, since it lies completely outside the sphere of sensation. Besides, modern science has clearly shown that the existence of which alone we can be said to have any knowledge is not matter *per se*, but force. But, then, force can only make itself manifest by motion, and where there is motion something must be moved. If we say that this moving body is matter, as it probably is, then comes the question, Which was the eternal existence, force or matter, or both? If force, how could it exist as motion when

there was nothing to be moved? And if matter, how could there be motion—and we have no conception of matter without motion—in the absence of force, which is the cause of motion? If it be contended that both —matter and force—were eternal, then have we not two absolute and infinite existences, which is a contradiction? The Theist postulates spirit; but that only adds a fresh difficulty, as will be seen presently. Here Agnosticism at once declares the whole subject to be outside of our gnosis, and, therefore, one which does not concern us, and of which nothing is known, or can be known. Herbert Spencer remarks that, on the origin of the universe, three hypotheses only are possible: 1. That it is self-existent (Atheism). 2. That it is self-created (Pantheism). 3. That it is created by an external agency (Theism). Mr. Spencer has, at very considerable length, examined each of these theories, and shown them all to be unthinkable. His position is that a self-existent universe, which is a universe existing without a beginning, is inconceivable. We cannot even think clearly of "existence without beginning." And, if we could, it would afford no kind of explanation of the universe itself. The first theory, therefore, is untenable. But no less so is the second—that of a created universe. To hold this it is necessary, to again use Herbert Spencer's words, to "conceive potential existence passing into actual existence." Is it possible, however, to form a conception of potential existence except as something which is, in fact, actual existence—the very thing which it is not? It cannot be supposed as "nothing," for that involves two absurdities—(1) That nothing can be represented in thought; (2) that some one nothing is so far separated from other nothings as to

be capable of passing into something. Again, existence passing from one state to another without some external agency implies a "change without a cause—a thing of which no idea is possible." A self-created universe is, consequently, inconceivable. There is still left the third theory—that the universe was created by some external agency. But here a difficulty arises in the attempt to think of "the production of matter out of nothing." Moreover, there is still greater difficulty if we suppose the creation of space. If space were created, then there was a time when it was non-existent, which is also utterly inconceivable. But suppose all these difficulties overcome, there is yet another, the greatest of all. What is the external agency referred to? And how came it into being? These are questions to which no satisfactory answers have been given. Thus the origin of the universe belongs to a region into which no human mind can enter, and therefore Agnosticism is the only possible attitude of thought we can consistently take with regard to the matter.

The same lack of knowledge applies to the *nature* of the universe. Here we encounter speculations in abundance; but demonstrative facts are nowhere to be discovered. Herbert Spencer has shown that every sensation we experience compels us, whether we will or not, to infer a cause, and this idea of causation drives us irresistibly to a First Cause. And yet the moment we think we have reached it we are landed in all kinds of contradictions and absurdities. For instance, is this First Cause infinite or finite? If infinite, it is beyond our comprehension, outside the sphere of our knowledge; and if finite, then there must be something beyond its bounds, and it is no longer the

First Cause. The Duke of Argyle, in his *Reign of Law*, observes: "We cannot reach final causes any more than final purposes; for every cause which we can detect there is another cause which lies behind; and for every purpose which we can see there are other purposes which lie beyond." By holding that the universe is infinite, to use the words of Spencer himself, "we tacitly abandon the hypothesis of causation altogether." The First Cause must also be either independent or dependent. But, if independent, we can have no idea of it at all, because everything we know and think of is dependent. If, however, the First Cause be dependent, then it must, being dependent, depend on something else, and that something else becomes the First Cause, to which the same argument will apply. In a similar manner, this cause must be absolute, and yet, as Mansel has shown, "A cause cannot, as such, be absolute; the absolute, as such, cannot be a cause." The reason of this is very obvious: the cause, as a cause, exists only in relation to the effect. But the absolute must be out of all relation, or it would cease to be absolute. Yet, in truth, we cannot conceive of the absolute at all. It lies beyond the reach of finite faculties to grapple with; hence we are compelled to relegate the entire matter to the domain of the unknowable. The power which manifests itself in the universe is utterly inscrutable, and therefore we are driven to Agnosticism to find in it a solid resting-place in reference to the origin and nature of the universe.

The existence of God is another question to which Agnosticism can be logically applied, for the obvious reason that it relates to that—if it exist—which lies beyond the reach of finite powers. Let us glance at

some of the various methods that have been pursued —indeed, are still resorted to—to prove the existence of God. The object in doing this, be it observed, is not to attempt the foolish impossibility of proving the *non*-existence of God. That would not be Agnosticism; but the desire here is to indicate that the question of the existence of God is a subject upon which man, to be logical, must, from the very nature of the case, be Agnostic. Demonstration of the existence of God will hardly be contended for, except perhaps by the advocates of the *à priori* method, and that need not be noticed here, since few representative Theists resort to it, and fewer still have any idea what it really means. The kinds of proof that are conceivable to be relied upon in this matter are as follows :—

(a) The Senses.—These, however, can never furnish an argument to prove the existence of God, inasmuch as our organs of sense have no power to perceive anything that does not belong to the mere phenomenal part of matter, and, hence, can never show us the noumenon underlying appearances, much less an existence which is said to be in no way material. If God has given a revelation, such revelation may be seen or heard; but this, of itself, can only prove the revelation, not God. Suppose we heard a voice, in tones of thunder which shook the earth, and reached every human ear, declare "There is a God," it would prove nothing but the voice—not the God proclaimed. The senses would perceive a sound, to which a very definite meaning might be attached; but the sound would not be God. It will not be denied by any intelligent Theist that God can never become an object of sense, and, therefore, that method of proof may be dismissed as totally unavailing in the case.

(b) Scientific Research.—"Canst thou by searching find out God?" is a question that was asked some thousands of years ago, and only one answer has ever been, or probably ever can be, given, and that is a negative one. Science, mighty and potent as it is for good, much as it has done to ameliorate the condition of mankind, and great as its triumphs are likely to be in the future, can never transcend sense knowledge. All its processes are of a material character; its instruments, together with the subjects which they explore, are material, the phenomena with which it deals are material, and all its discoveries are reported to the bodily organs of sense. Beyond the physical domain of appearances no scientific investigations can ever go; no telescope or microscope can show us a trace of spirit; nor, in fact, of that, whatever it may be, which underlies phenomena. Scientific facts may lead up to philosophical generalisations; but such generalisations are reached by ratiocination (process of reasoning), and are no longer exclusively scientific —in fact, they are in a sense altogether independent of science. A scientific fact and the interpretation of the fact are totally different things. We may use science as a means for reading the riddles of nature; the reading, however, is not science, but philosophy; and science has but helped us to the facts which the process that is not scientific has to explain. The Theist tells us, with Newton, that science leads up to God; but it will be seen that the upward road has ceased to be within the domain of science long before its termination is reached.

(c) Logical Reasoning.—Here, of course, it will be argued by the Theist that we start on firm and solid ground. A moment's reflection, however, will show

that this is by no means the case. Our starting point and the conclusion at which we seek to arrive lie so far apart that by no process of logic can we pass from one to the other. There is, in truth, a great gulf between them, and we do not and cannot possess the means of bridging it over. In all mathematical reasoning we start from some axiom or necessary truth, which we find in our minds, and which, by a law of our mentation, cannot be got rid of. This we make the basis of all our reasoning, and the foundation of the entire superstructure that we desire to erect. In geometry, in arithmetic, and in logic this is equally the case. Now, all these starting points, whether they be axioms relating to space, notions regarding quantity, or mental conceptions, lie in our minds, and are only known to us by the fact that we find them there. From these we may reason, forming a long chain of logical links, until, at the end, we reach some truth of a marvellous and startling character, which is as easy of demonstration as the concept or axiom with which we started. In this way Theists endeavour to reason up to God. But it requires no very profound thought to show that the process must break down before it reaches that point. For instance, there is the fact that the conclusion must be of the same quality as the starting point. If the primary truth with which we commenced be internal to our minds, so must the conclusion be at which we arrive. Beginning with ourselves, we must continue and end with ourselves, and by no possibility can we reach anything that is exterior to us. If, therefore, we reason up to a concept to which the name of God is given, we shall be as far as ever from a demonstration of his actual being. We shall still be dealing with an

idea which exists simply in our own minds, and may or may not—for here demonstration ceases and the logical argument breaks down—be a measure of some real existence. But there is another reason why this logical process must fail. The attributes ascribed to God are of that character about which we cannot reason. However exalted the conception at which we arrive, it must be finite, relative, and conditioned, while God is said to be infinite, absolute, and unconditioned. It is, therefore, impossible that God can be the last term of a logical induction. Of course, this does not furnish conclusive proof that the absolute and unconditioned has no existence; it does, however, prove that we cannot know everything of it, since it transcends all our powers and faculties. It belongs to a sphere to which we have no access. Hence, in all our research, investigation, and thought, we halt when we approach the domain of the unknowable, bow our heads, and unfurl the banner of Agnosticism.

For an individual to assert positively that he *knows* that a God exists, who is an infinite personal being, is, in the face of the present limitation of human knowledge, to betray an utter disregard of accuracy of expression. With the majority of orthodox believers the term "God" is a phrase used to cover a lack of information. Persons behold certain phenomena; the why and wherefore thereof they cannot explain; and because to them such things are mysterious they pause at the threshold of inquiry, and, to avoid what appear to be inscrutable difficulties, allege that such phenomena are caused by God. Dr. Young, the Christian Theist, in his *Province of Reason*, says: "That concerning which I have no

idea at all is to me nothing, in every sense nothing. .....To believe in that respecting which I can form no notion is to believe in nothing; it is not to believe at all." This represents the position of Christian Theism. Although a person may picture an object in his mind from an analogous subject, it has yet to be shown how an idea can be formed of that upon which no knowledge exists, either analogous or otherwise. All notions that have been entertained of gods have been but reflexes of human weaknesses, human desires, and human passions, and therefore they do not represent an infinite personal Being. The God acknowledged by "Advanced Theists" is not the same Being in many respects as the one believed in by the orthodox school. Neither does the object worshipped by the Deist correspond with the "Supreme Power" of the Pantheist. Then, if we go to the Bible, we discover very different notions of God therein recorded. He is there described as material, and also as immaterial; first as all-wise, and then again as betraying a lack of wisdom; in one place as being all-powerful, and in another as being exceedingly weak; at one time as being loving, merciful, and unchangeable, at another as being revengeful, cruel, and fickle in the extreme. Surely, to rely on such absurd and contradictory descriptions of a God as these are is more unreasonable than to frankly admit that, if God exist, he is and must be, unknown to us. This is not a denial, but an honest confession that mentally any more than physically we cannot perform the impossible.

It is alleged that the "God idea" is firmly rooted in the human mind. This is sheer folly! What is meant in this instance by an idea? A mental picture of something external to the individual. But where is that

"something" corresponding with the many and varied representations of a God? The truth is, this supposed "idea" is no reality whatever, but simply a vague "idea" of an "idea," of which, in fact, no idea exists. Besides, the term "Infinite Personal Being" is a contradiction. Personality is that which constitutes an individual a distinct being. This definition implies three requisites: First, that the person shall be a personage; second, that he shall be distinct from other things; and, third, that he shall be bounded—that is, limited. But a bounded, limited being is a finite being, and, therefore, cannot be an infinite personal being. Is the assumed personality of God different from mine? If so, where is the difference? Furthermore, is my personality a part of God's personality? If it is, my personality is "divine"; if it is not, then there are two personalities, neither of which can possibly be infinite, for where there are two each must be finite. Again, personality is only known to us as a part of a material organisation. If, therefore, God is material, he is part of the universe. If he be a part, he cannot be infinite, inasmuch as the part cannot be equal to the whole. Personality involves intelligence, and intelligence implies: (1) Acquirement of knowledge, which indicates that the time was when the person who gained additional information lacked certain wisdom; (2) memory, which is the power of recalling past events—but with the infinite there can be no past; (3) hope, which is based on limited perception, and which shows the uncertain condition of the mind wherein the aspiration is found. Now, if God possesses these imperfect faculties, he is finite; while, on the other hand, if they do not belong to him, he is not an intelligent being.

Neither does the Theistic definition of God, as being infinite, harmonise with our reasoning faculties. Reason is based upon experience, but an Infinite Being must be outside the domain of experience; reason implies reflection, but we cannot reflect upon infinity, because it is unthinkable; reason implies comparison, but the Infinite Being cannot be compared, for there is nothing with which to compare him; reason implies judgment, but the finite is totally incompetent to judge of the infinite; reason is bounded by the capacity of the mind in which it resides, but the mind to conceive the infinite must be unbounded; reason follows perception, but we have no faculties for perceiving or recognising the infinite. Therefore, is not the Agnostic position of silence as to the unknown the more reasonable? If it be urged that it is no part of Agnostic philosophy to consider these Theistic assumptions, the answer is that, if such notions are well-founded on demonstrated facts, there is no reason for the Agnostic attitude towards them. It is in proving that Theistic allegations are unsupported by observed truths which renders Agnosticism logical and justifiable. Let it be distinctly understood that it is not against the existence and nature of a God, *per se*, that exception is here taken—of those we know nothing—but against the positive claims urged in reference to these subjects. To these our indictment is directed.

The orthodox notion of the "innate consciousness of God's existence" does not strengthen the position of the Christian Theist, for the reason that it is groundless in fact. No doubt, the error upon this point has arisen with many persons through their regarding consciousness as a separate faculty of the

mind, whereas James Mill, Locke, Brown, and Buckle have shown it to be a condition of the mind produced by early training and surrounding associations. George Grote, in his *Review of J. S. Mill's Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, aptly remarks: "Each new-born child finds his religious creed ready prepared for him. In his earliest days of unconscious infancy, the stamp of the national, gentle, phratric God, or Gods, is imprinted upon him by his elders." Thus it happens that what are too frequently but the consequences of youthful impressions and subsequent tuition are regarded as veritable realities. If this "God idea" were innate, is it not reasonable to suppose that all persons would have it? But there are thousands of persons who are ready to acknowledge that they do not have it; and those who profess to have it are unable to explain what it is. Probably, if a child never heard of God in the morning of his life he would have no fancies concerning him in his mature age. It is to be feared that these Theistic pretensions arise from an inadequate acquaintance with the now admitted natural forces. There is, however, this hope—that, as knowledge still advances, dogmatism will proportionately disappear, priestcraft will yield to mental freedom, and efforts to control Nature and reliance on her prolific resources will more than ever take the place of supplicating for, and dependence on, alleged supernatural help.

The once favourite argument drawn from design in the universe affords no justification for the positive allegations of Theism. As Professor Taylor Lewis admits: "Nature alone cannot prove the existence of a Deity possessed of moral attributes." Has it ever occurred to Theists that at the very most the God of

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the design argument can only be a finite being, for nowhere among what are supposed to be the marks of design in Nature is an infinite designer indicated? Now, a God that is finite is neither omniscient, omnipotent, nor eternal. The design argument, moreover, points to no unity in God. According to natural theology, there may be one God or hundreds of Gods. The Rev. S. Faber frankly observes: "The Deist never did, and he never can, prove without the aid of Revelation that the universe was designed by a single designer." Paley's well-known comparison of the eye and the telescope proves the very opposite of that for which it was used. It should be remembered that, but for the imperfection of the eye, the telescope would not have been required. Plainly, the argument may be stated thus: Designer of the telescope, man; designer of the eye, God; telescope imperfect, hence its designer was imperfect; the eye more imperfect, since the telescope was invented to improve its power; *ergo*, God, the designer of eyes, was still less perfect than man, the designer of telescopes.

If nothing else rebuked the dogmatic assumption of the Christian Theist, the existence of so much misery, evil, and inequality in the world should do so. What well-disposed man or woman, who had the power, would hesitate for a moment to use it to alleviate the affliction, to cure the wrong and to destroy the injustice which cast such a gloom over a large portion of society? Let the many records of the world's benevolence, devotion, and kindness give the reply. To lessen the pain of the afflicted, to assist the needy, to help the oppressed, are characteristics of human nature which its noblest sons and daughters have ever manifested in

their deeds of heroic self-denial. Contemplating the success of crime, the triumph of despotism, the prevalence of want, the struggles on the part of many to obtain the mere means of existence, the appalling sights of physical deformity—beholding all these wrongs, this sadness and despair, who shall dogmatically exclaim, "All Nature proclaims a Fatherhood of God"?

The question of immortality scarcely belongs to the same class of subjects as the others which have here been discussed; nevertheless, even upon this subject the Agnostic position appears to me to be the correct one. Personally, I refuse to dogmatise either one way or the other; and the question, after all, is but of little consequence; for our business is with this world; and the affairs of the next may be left until we land upon its shores, if such shores there be. To ignore the teachings said to refer to another life is not necessarily to deny the existence of that life. One thing is certain, and that is our present existence. Furthermore, experience teaches us that time is too short, duties too imperative, and consequences too important to justify us in wasting our resources and displaying a disturbing anxiety about, to us, an unknown future.

> "Life's span forbids us to extend our cares,
> And stretch our hopes beyond our years."

There are two objections frequently urged against the Agnostic position which with some people have considerable force. The first is that Agnosticism robs man of the great consolation and incentive imparted by the belief in the certainty of the existence of a "Heavenly Father" and a future life. In the second place, it is contended that Agnosticism fails to

satisfy the demands of the human intellect. Let us examine these objections, with a view of ascertaining whether or not they possess any weight bearing upon the present question.

The first objection supposes that without Theism and its teachings there is no adequate comfort and peace for the human race; that this life of itself is but little more than "a vale of tears," alike destitute of the sunshine of joy and of the power of imparting happiness in every-day life. Persons who entertain these gloomy ideas regard existence as being necessarily full of trouble, and they think that mankind are incapable, with mere natural resources, of enjoying a high state of felicity, and that true bliss is only to be secured by believing in God and entertaining the hope of pleasure in another world. Such morbid notions are born of a dismal faith, and find no sanction in the real healthy view of life's mission. Existence is not a mere blank; its condition depends largely upon the use mankind make of it. To some, the world may be as a garden adorned with the choicest of flowers, and to others as a wilderness covered with worthless weeds. Life of itself is not destitute of beauty, glory, solace, and love. True, it is sometimes darkened with clouds, but it is also enlivened with sunshine; it is degraded by serfdom, and elevated by freedom; it is shaded by isolation, and illuminated by fellowship; it is chilled by misery and persecution, and warmed by kindness and affection; it is blasted by poverty and want, and invigorated by wealth and comfort; it is marred by shams and inequalities, and glorified by realities and equity; it is humiliated by unequal and excessive toil, and dignified by fair and honest labour; it has its punishments through wrong and neglect, but it has

its rewards in right and correct action. The lesson of experience teaches us unmistakably that life is worth having even if Theism and the teachings in reference to a future existence be nothing more than emotional speculations.

As to the second objection, it is said that man is born to inquire; his whole nature is bent in the direction of discovery; curiosity to pry into the secrets of nature and being forms one of his leading characteristics; therefore, Agnosticism, which places a barrier to his further investigation, must be objectionable, because it fixes the limits beyond which he may not go. This allegation, if worth anything, must be urged, not against Agnosticism, but against the limit of human powers. To tell man that there are subjects which he can never master, not for lack of time to look into them, but because they lie in a domain to which, by the very nature of the case, he can gain no access, should certainly not be sufficient to stop his inquiry with regard to matters upon which knowledge is to be obtained. The Theist believes that he can never fully comprehend God; but does that prevent him from endeavouring to learn what he can? Agnosticism has not placed limits to the human mind, but only defined them; it has not erected the barrier beyond which the human intellect cannot pass, but only described it; it has not invented the line which separates the knowable from the unknowable, but only indicated its position. The mind of man is, therefore, free to inquire to the utmost extent of its powers, and the complaint that it cannot do more is foolish in the extreme.

Agnosticism is sufficient for all the purposes of life, and more than that cannot surely be needed. There

is no human duty that it is not compatible with, no human feeling that it does not allow full play to, and no intellectual effort that it would attempt to place restrictions upon. It leaves man in possession of all his mental force, seeking only to direct that force into a legitimate channel where it may find full scope for its powers. The Agnostic does not fail to carry on his investigations into Nature to the utmost extent of his ability. He seeks to wring from her secrets hidden through all the ages of the past; he pushes his inquiries from point to point, and learns all that can be known of the marvellous processes of life and mind, and only stops when he confronts the unknowable, beyond whose barrier he cannot pass. All nature, with its majestic varieties, lies before him, presenting subjects of the keenest interest. In these he can rejoice; but the incomprehensible he does not seek to comprehend, the unknowable he does not make the idle attempt to know. In a word, he is a man, and he aims not at the impossible task of becoming a God. Is not this course more courageous, more dignified, and more candid than that adopted by the dogmatic theologian, who, yearning for a knowledge of the absolute, and yet failing to discover it, lacks the courage to avow his inability to achieve the impossible?

EVOLUTION AND SPECIAL CREATION

PERHAPS there is no domain of human thought where the advantages of scientific investigation are more clear and pronounced than in connection with the theory of Evolution, which is opposed to the old orthodox notion of special creation and supernatural government. There are, of course, some professedly religious people who avow their belief in evolution, and who maintain that it is what they call God's mode of working; and there are those who even go so far as as to say that the power and wisdom of God are seen more thoroughly displayed in the process of evolution than in the method, so long believed in, of special and supernatural creation. But the number of these is comparatively small, and, consequently, the great mass of those who accept the word in its legitimate signification may be looked upon as of a sceptical turn of mind.

The term "evolution" may be defined as an unfolding, opening out, or unwinding; a disclosure of something which was not previously known, but which existed before in a more condensed or in a hidden form. There is no new existence called into being, but that which was previously concealed is made conspicuous to our eyes. "Evolution teaches that the universe and man did not always exist in their present

form; neither are they the product of a sudden creative act, but rather the result of innumerable changes from the lower to the higher, each step in advance being an evolution from a pre-existing condition." On the other hand, the special creation doctrine teaches that, during a limited period, God created the universe and man, and that the various phenomena are not the result simply of natural law, but the outcome of supernatural design. According to Herbert Spencer, the whole theory of evolution is based upon three principles—namely, that matter is indestructible, motion continuous, and force persistent. Two contending processes will be seen everywhere in operation in the physical universe, the one antagonistic to the other, each for a time triumphing over its opposite. These are termed "evolution" and "dissolution." Spencer remarks that "Evolution, under its simplest aspect, is the integration of matter and the dissipation of motion, while dissolution is the absorption of motion and the concomitant disintegration of matter." Thus it will be seen that he evidently regards evolution as the concentration or transition of matter from a diffused to a more condensed and perceptible form. This change he traces in the systems of the stars; in the geological history of the earth; in the growth and development of plants and animals; in the history of language and the fine arts, and in the condition of civilised States. Briefly, the theory is that the matter of which the universe is composed has progressed from a vague, incoherent, and, perhaps, all but homogeneous nebula of tremendous extent, to complete systems of suns, worlds, comets, sea, and land, and to countless varieties of living things, each

composed of many very different parts, and of complex organisations.

Coming to the organic bodies, there may be included under the term "evolution" many different laws, some of which we may not even know as yet, and a great number of processes, acting sometimes in unison, and often in antagonism the one to the other. This, however, in no way weakens the theory of evolution, which, beyond doubt, is the process by which things have been brought to their present condition. It will tend, perhaps, to elucidate this truth the more readily and clearly if a brief exposition of the theory be given under the chief divisions of this extensive subject.

The Formation of Worlds.—According to evolution, the present cosmos began its development at an immeasurably remote date, and any attempt to comprehend the periods that have rolled by since would paralyse our highest intellectual powers. When the matter which is now seen shaped into suns and stars of vast magnitude, and of untold numbers, was diffused over the whole of the space in which those bodies are now seen moving—of extreme variety, and, perhaps, of nearly homogeneous character—the human mind is unable to comprehend. This matter, by virtue of the very laws now seen in operation in the physical universe, must in time shape itself into bodies with which the heavens are strewed, shining with a glory that awes while it charms. What is called the nebular cosmogony may be said to have arisen with Sir William Herschel, who discovered with his telescope that which seemed to be worlds and systems in course of formation—that is, they

were in various states which appeared to mark different degrees of condensation.

M. Laplace, without any knowledge of Herschel's speculations, arrived at a similar idea upon a totally different ground—namely, the uniformity of the heavenly bodies. He showed that, if matter existed in such a different state as the nebular theory assumed, and if nuclei existed in it, they would become centres of aggregation in which a rotary motion would increase as the agglomeration proceeded. Further, Laplace urged that at certain intervals the centrifugal force acting in the rotating mass would overcome the force of agglomeration, and the result would be a series of rings existing apart from the mass to which they originally adhered, each of which would retain the motion which it possessed at the moment of separation. These rings would again break up into spherical bodies, and hence come what are termed primary bodies and their satellites. This Laplace showed to be at least possible, and the results, in the case of our solar system, are just what would have been expected from the operations of this law. For example, everyone knows that the rapidity of the motions in the planets is in the ratio of their nearness to the sun.

Many facts seem to support this theory, such as the existence of the hundred and more small bodies, called asteroids, observed between Mars and Jupiter, which doubtless indicate a zone of agglomeration at several points, and the rings of Saturn give an example of zones still preserved intact. This theory has been held by some of the most eminent astronomers. Some experiments have also been tried—as, for example, that of Plateau on a rotating globe of oil—which showed the operation of the law by

which the suns, planets, and their moons were formed. Such is the evolution of worlds, and it is unnecessary to point out how diametrically it is opposed to the special creation described in Genesis, where the heavens and the earth are called suddenly into being by the fiat of God, and where it is stated that the sun was created four days afterwards. Which theory should, in these days of thought, commend itself to a rational mind?

The Beginning of Life upon the Earth.—Evolution has been subjected to many severe attacks at this point. Those who contend for special creation have maintained, with a dogmatism which but ill accords with the knowledge they possess upon the subject, that nothing but the hypothesis of the supernatural origin of things is sufficient to account for the first appearance of life upon the earth, that evolution completely breaks down here, and that all the experiments which have been conducted with a view to lend it support have turned out positive failures. Such is the allegation of orthodox opponents. Let us see what grounds they have for these reckless and dogmatic statements. The two views of the origin of living beings have been called respectively *Biogenesis* and *Abiogenesis*, the first meaning that life can spring only from prior life, and the latter that life may sometimes have its origin in dead matter. Dr. Charlton Bastian substitutes for *Abiogenesis* another word, *Archebiosis*.

Now, it is well known and generally admitted that there was a time when no life existed on the earth. Not the most minute animal, or the most insignificant plant, found a place on the surface of

what was probably at that time a globe heated up to a temperature at which no living thing could exist. The life, therefore, that did afterwards appear could not have sprung from germs of prior living bodies. True, the whimsical theory has been put forward that the first germs that found their way to the earth were probably thrown off with meteoric matter from some other planet. But on the face of it this is absurd, because such matter would be of too high a temperature to admit of the existence upon it of living bodies of any kind; and, besides, were it otherwise, it would explain nothing. It would only transfer the difficulty from this world to some other. For life must certainly have had a beginning somewhere, and the question is as to that beginning. The supernaturalist seeks to get out of the difficulty rather by cutting the Gordian knot than by untying it, and falls back upon a special creation, thereby avoiding any further trouble about the matter. But the evolutionist thinks that he can see his way clearly in what must necessarily be to some extent a labyrinth, because no one lived at that time to observe and record what was taking place. One thing is plain, which is, that living things were made or came into existence—whatever the mode may have been, or the power by which it occurred—out of non-living matter. The only question is, therefore, whether the process occurred in accordance with natural law, and whether the forces by which it was brought about were those which exist, or, at all events, which did exist, in material nature. For it does not follow that, if such phenomena do not occur to-day, they could never have taken place in the past. The conditions of the earth were different then from what they are now, and forces may have been in

operation that are now quiescent. Professor Huxley, who thought that no instance had occurred in modern times of the evolution of a living organism from dead matter, and that the experiments which have been conducted on the subject were inconclusive—who, in fact, ranked himself on the side of the advocates of *Biogenesis*—yet he said that, if we could go back millions of years to the dawn of life, we should, no doubt, behold living bodies springing from non-living matter.

But, of course, it will be argued that, if it happened then, it might take place now; and although, as I have said, this is not conclusive, yet to some it has much weight. What Nature has done once, it is insisted, she can do again. Quite so; but, then, all the conditions must be the same. Dr. Bastian himself asks the question: "If such synthetic processes took place then, why should they not take place now? Why should the inherent molecular properties of various kinds of matter have undergone so much alteration?" (*Beginnings of Life*). And the question is likely to be repeated, with, to say the least of it, some show of reason.

It must never be forgotten, as Tyndall has very ably pointed out, that the matter of which the organic body is built up "is that of inorganic nature. There is no substance in the animal tissues that is not primarily derived from the rocks, the water, and the air." And the forces operating in the one are those which we see working in the other, vitality only excepted, which is probably but another manifestation of the one great force of the universe. Indeed, Professor Huxley did not make an exception even in the case of vitality, which, he maintained, has no more

actual existence than the imaginary aqueosity of water. Herbert Spencer thought that life, under all its forms, has arisen by an unbroken evolution, and through natural causes alone; and this view accords with the highest reason and philosophy.

Nor have the experiments performed with the view of solving the problem been so conclusive as they may appear to some. At all events, the question is an open one as to whether the origin of living things in non-living matter has not been experimentally demonstrated. The old doctrine of "spontaneous generation" can, in its new form and under its recent name of *Abiogenesis*, or *Archebiosis*, claim the support of men in the scientific world both of the past and at the present time. Pouchet, a very illustrious Frenchman, performed a large number of experiments, and in all or most of them he succeeded, according to his own opinion, in producing living things. The objection that there were germs in the air, or water, or the materials that he employed, he met by manufacturing artificial water out of oxygen and hydrogen, and submitting the whole of the material employed to a temperature above boiling-water point, which would certainly destroy any living germ, either of an animal or vegetable character. Then, in England a series of experiments were performed by Dr. Bastian, who maintained that he has succeeded, in innumerable instances, in producing living organisms from non-living matter. For the result of the latest investigations upon this subject the reader is referred to Professor Haeckel's recently-published work, *The Wonders of Life*. Therein will be found some valuable facts in favour of the theory of Abiogenesis, or what Haeckel terms Saprobiosis. Hence the doctrine of

evolution, which is in accordance with true philosophy, finds its support in that physical science where we should expect to meet with it, and to which it really belongs.

The Origin of Man.—It has already been stated that the remains of man are met with only in the most recent geological deposits. On this point there will be no dispute. No doubt human beings have been in existence for a much longer period than is generally supposed; the short term of six thousand years, which our fathers considered to cover man's entire history, pales into insignificance before the vast periods which we know to have rolled their course since human life began. But that fact in no way affects the question before us. Man was certainly the last animal that appeared, as he was the highest. If it be asked, Why highest as well as last? the answer is, Because, by the process of evolution, the highest must come last. This is the law that we have seen operating all through the physical universe, so far as that universe has disclosed to us its mighty secrets, hidden for ages, but now revealed to scientific observation and experiment. Man came, as other organic bodies came, by no special creation, but by the great forces of nature, which move always in the same direction, and work to the same end. As far as the physical powers are concerned, it will not be difficult to conceive the same laws operating in his production that originated the various other forms of organic beings. His body is built up of the same materials, upon precisely the same plan: during life he is subject to the same growth and decay, the same building up and pulling down of tissues; and it is

but reasonable to suppose that the same forces originated his beginning, as we know they will some day terminate his existence.

Charles Darwin made a bold stroke when he gave the world his *Descent of Man*. In 1859 he had published the first edition of his work on *The Origin of Species*, which fell like a thunderbolt into the religious camp. The commotion it caused was tremendous, and the effect can to-day hardly be imagined; so tolerant have we grown of late, and so great a change has passed over the scene within the past half-century. The most violent opposition raged against the new views; ridicule, denunciation, and abuse were hurled at the head of the man who had propounded so preposterous a theory as that all organic things had sprung from a few simple living forms very low down in the scale of being. Then came a larger work, entitled *Animals and Plants under Domestication*, brimful of facts of a most startling character, supporting the theory advanced in the previous book, and challenging refutation on all hands. In the face of these facts, the public mind cooled down a little, opposition became milder, some adversaries were converted, and others manifested indifference. The major part of those who still adhered to the supernatural and special creations held that, even if the theory of evolution turned out to be true, it would not apply to man, who was a being possessed of an immortal soul, and, therefore, belonged to a different order of creatures from any other animals, and that Darwin never intended to include human beings in the organic structures thus originated.

In this state the controversy remained until 1872, when Darwin took the bull by the horns, and at

one stroke swept away the last stronghold of special creation by showing that humanity was no exception to the great law of evolution; for man, like other animals, had originated in natural selection. The facts given in the book on *The Descent of Man* are both powerful and pertinent. This, however, is not the place to dwell upon natural selection, and it is only referred to so far as it supports evolution. The difficulties that have been placed in the way of the application of this principle to man have not had much reference to his bodily organs, but mainly to his mental and moral powers, his social faculties, and the emotional side of his nature. True, a controversy raged for a short time between Huxley and Owen as to whether there was a special structure in the human brain not to be found in the next animals lower in the scale of being; but this contention has long since died out, and to-day no anatomist of any note will be found contending for the existence of any such organ. That the human brain differs considerably from the brain of any lower animal no one who is at all acquainted with the subject will deny; but this is difference in degree, and not arising from the presence of any special structure in the one which is absent in the other. Man, therefore, must look for his origin just where he seeks for that of the inferior creatures.

The science of embryology, which is now much more carefully studied, and, consequently, much better known than at any period in the past, lends very powerful support to evolution, though, perhaps, little to natural selection. "The primordial germs," says Huxley, "of a man, a dog, a bird, a fish, a beetle, a snail, and a polyp are in no essential structural respects distinguishable" (*Lay Sermons*). Each

organism, in fact, commences its individual career at the same point—that is, in a single cell. These cells are of the same chemical composition, approximately on the same size, and appear to be in all respects identical. Yet the one developes into a fish, another into a reptile, a third into a bird, a fourth into a dog, and a fifth into a man. The process is the same in all up to a certain point. First, the cell divides into two, then into four, eight, sixteen, and so on, until a particular condition is reached, called by Haeckel *morula*, when a totally different set of changes occur. In the case of the higher animals the development of the embryo exhibits, up to the very late period, a remarkable resemblance to that of man.

The Diversity of Living Things.—A mere glance at the geological records will show at once that the order in which animals and plants have appeared on the earth is that which accords with evolution. The lowest came first, the highest last, and a regular gradation between the two extremes. In the early rocks in which life appears we meet with polyps, coral, sea-worms, etc., and no trace of land animals or plants. Then, passing upwards, we come upon fishes, then reptiles, afterwards birds, subsequently mammals, and, last of all, man. These are undisputed facts, as the most elementary works on geology, whether written by a professing Christian or an unbeliever, will clearly show.

The only objection, perhaps, of any weight that can be urged against the changes which evolution asserts to have taken place is the fact that we do not see them occur. But this, in the first place, is hardly correct, since we see the tadpole—which is a fish

breathing through gills and living in the water—pass up into a reptile, the frog, which is a land animal breathing through lungs, and inhaling its oxygen from the atmosphere. Secondly, the fact that we do not see a change actually occur, which took millions of years to become effected, can surely amount to little. An ephemeral insect, whose life lasts for only a day, might object, if able to reason, that an acorn could not grow into an oak tree because it had not seen it occur. But the evidence would be there still in the numerous gradations that might be seen between the acorn and the sturdy old tree that had weathered the storms of a century. And in this case we see all the gradations between a monad and a man in the rocks, which furnish us with the history of the past, although, as our lives are so short, we are not able to see the whole change effected. Plants were not all suddenly called into existence at one particular period, and then animals at another and later time. This we know, because the remains of plants and animals are found side by side throughout all the rocks. There is an exception, and an unfortunate one for the Christian supernaturalist, since it shows that animals were first; for certain it is that animal remains are met with in the oldest rocks.

The objection to evolution, that no transformation of one species into another has been seen within recorded history, is entirely groundless, and betrays utter carelessness on the part of the objectors. The truth is, such transformations have taken place, as mentioned above in reference to the tadpole. Professor Huxley and other scientists have proved this to be the case. It should, however, be remembered that in most instances these great changes are the

work of time. Let us apply a test to the creative theory with a similar demand, and what will be the result? An utter failure on the part of the creationists to substantiate their dogmatic pretensions. Suppose we exclaimed, "Show us a single creative act of one species within recorded history." It would be impossible for them to do so, for there is not a shadow of evidence drawn from human experience in favour of what theologians call creation. We perceive a certain order and certain method in nature; we see that under new conditions certain variations do take place in vegetable and animal structures, and by an irresistible law of our intellect we associate the variations with the conditions in the way of cause and effect. Of such a method we can form some notion, and bring it within the realm of reason; of any other plan, however it may be received, we can form no rational conception.

"The whole analogy of natural operations," says Professor Huxley, "furnishes so complete and crushing an argument against the intervention of any but what are called *secondary causes* in the production of all the phenomena of the universe that, in view of the intimate relations between man and the rest of the living world, and between the forces exerted by the latter and all other forces, I can see no excuse for doubting that all are co-ordinated terms of nature's great progression, from the formless to the formed, from the inorganic to the organic, from blind force to conscious intellect and will." The most that can be said of the creative theory is that it is a question of belief; but of knowledge never.

To me it has always been a difficulty to understand *how* an infinite being could possibly have been the

creator of all things. For this reason: if he is infinite, he is everywhere; if everywhere, he is in the universe; if in the universe now, he was always there. If he were always in the universe, there never was a time when the universe was not; therefore, it could never have been created.

If it be said that this being was not always in the universe, then there must have been a period when he occupied less space than he did subsequently. But "lesser" and "greater" cannot be applied to that which is eternally infinite. Further, before we can recognise the soundness of the position taken by the advocates of special creation, we have to think of a time when there was no time—of a place where there was no place. Is this possible? If it were, it would be interesting to learn where an infinite God was at that particular period, and how, in "no time," he could perform his creative act. Besides, if a being really exist who created all things, the obvious questions at once are, "Where was this being before anything else existed?" "Was there a time when God over all was God over nothing? Can we believe that a God over nothing began to be out of nothing, and to create all things when there was nothing?" Moreover, if the universe was created, from what did it emanate? From nothing? But "from nothing, nothing can come." Was it created from something that already was? If so, it was no creation at all, but only a continuation of that which was in existence. Further, "creation needs action; to act is to use force; to use force implies the existence of something upon which that force can be used. But if that 'something' were there before creation, the act of creating was simply the re-forming of pre-existing materials." Here three

questions may be put to the opponents of evolution who affirm the idea of special creation:—(1) Is it logical to affirm the existence of that of which nothing is known, either of itself or by analogy? Now, it cannot be alleged that anything is *known* of the supposed supernatural power of creation. On the other hand, sufficient is known of the facts of evolution to prevent the careful student of Nature from attempting to rob her of that force and life-giving principle which undoubtedly belong to her. (2) Is it logical to ascribe events to causes the existence of which is unknown, and more particularly when such events can be reasonably explained upon natural principles with the aid of "the science of probabilities"? (3) Is it logical to urge the theory of special creation when science proclaims the stability of natural law, and its sufficiency for the production of all phenomena? Professor Tyndall, in his lecture on "Sound," remarks that, if there is one thing that science has demonstrated more clearly than another, it is the stability of the operations of the laws of nature. We feel assured from experience that this is so, and we act upon such assurance in our daily life. The same eminent scientist, in his Belfast Address, says: "Now, as science demands the radical extirpation of caprice, and the absolute reliance upon law in nature, there grew with the growth of scientific notions a desire and determination to sweep from the field of theory this mob of gods and demons, and to place natural phenomena on a basis more congruent with themselves." Again: "Is there not a temptation to close to some extent with Lucretius when he affirms that 'Nature is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself without the meddling of the gods,' or with Bruno when he declares

that Matter is not 'that mere empty capacity which philosophers have pictured her to be, but the universal mother who brings forth all things as the fruit of her own womb?'.....By an intellectual necessity I cross the boundary of the experimental evidence, and discern in that matter which we, in our ignorance of its latent powers, and notwithstanding our professed reverence for its creator, have hitherto covered with opprobrium, the promise and potency of all terrestrial life."

Psychical Powers.—This is the great stronghold of the opponents of evolution. They maintain that, whatever may have taken place with regard to physical powers and bodily organs, it is clear that the higher intellectual faculties of man could not so have originated; that those, at least, must be the result of a special creation, and must have been called into existence by some supernatural power when human beings first appeared upon the stage of life. Such persons further urge that, even if it could be shown beyond doubt that the marvellously-constructed body of man, with its beautifully adjusted parts of bone and muscle, nerve and brain, skin and mucous membrane, had its origin in evolution, yet no light whatever would be thrown upon the source of the wondrous powers of judgment and memory, understanding and will, perception and conception. This argument, no doubt, to some at first appears specious; but the question is, Is it sound? The assumption seems to be that we meet with these powers now for the first time, and that, therefore, it is here that a special creation must be called in to account for their origin, their character being so different from anything that has previously crossed our path in this investiga-

tion. But assuredly this is not correct. Some of these powers are certainly to be met with in the lower animals—a few of them low down in the scale—and for the rest the difference will be one of degree more than of quality.

It will not surely be maintained that perception is peculiar to man; it must exist wherever there are organs of sense, and these extend in some form or other to the lowest phase of animal life. Volition is also met with in all the higher animals; and memory may be observed in the dog, horse, elephant, cat, camel, and numerous other mammals, with whose habits every-day life makes us familiar. Even judgment in the form of comparison is often displayed by the domestic animals, the dog in particular. Dr. H. Bischoff, in his *Essay on the Difference between Man and Brutes*, says: "It is impossible to deny the animals, qualitatively and quantitatively, as many mental faculties as we find in man. They possess consciousness. They feel, think, and judge; they possess a will which determines their actions and motions. Animals possess attachment; they are grateful, obedient, good-natured; and, again, false, treacherous, disobedient, revengeful, jealous, etc. Their actions frequently evince deliberation and memory. It is in vain to derive such actions from so-called instinct, which unconsciously compels them so to act." Max Müller, also, in his *Science of Language*, admits that the lower animals have five senses like ourselves; that they have sensations of pain and pleasure; that they have memory; that they are able to compare and distinguish; that they have a will of their own, show signs of shame and pride, and are guided by intellect as well as by instinct.

With such facts as these before us, what reason have we for supposing that these psychical powers are not as likely to have been evolved as the bodily organs? There is no break whatever to be seen in the chain at the point of their appearance in man. If the mental powers of the lower animals have come by evolution, there is not a shadow of reason for supposing that those of man arose in any other way, for they are all of the same quality, differing only in degree. Charles Darwin says, "the difference between the mind of man and that of the highest ape is immense." And yet, as he also remarks, "great as it is, it is certainly one of degree, and not of kind." The highest powers of which man can boast—memory, judgment, love, attention, curiosity, imitation, emotion —may all be met with in an incipient form in lower animals. Let any man analyse his mental faculties one by one—not look at them in a state of combination, for that will be calculated to mislead—and then say which of them is peculiar to man as man, and not to be found in a smaller degree much lower in the scale of being. Even the capacity for improvement—in other words, for progress—is not peculiar to man, as Darwin has shown by innumerable examples of great force and beauty.

The emotions have often been spoken of as being peculiar to man, but evidently with no regard to accuracy. Terror exists in all the highest of the lower animals as surely as it does in man, and shows itself in the same way. It causes the heart to palpitate, a tremor to pass along the muscles, and even the hair to undergo that change which is called "standing on end," in the horse, the dog, and other animals, as in the human species. "Courage and

timidity," observes Darwin, "are extremely variable qualities in the individuals of the same species, as is plainly seen in our dogs. Some dogs and horses are ill-tempered and easily turn sulky; others are good-tempered; and these qualities are certainly inherited. Everyone knows how liable animals are to furious rage, and how plainly they show it." The love of the dog for his master is proverbial; indeed, this noble animal has been known to lick the hand of the vivisector while undergoing at his hands the severest torture. And revenge is often manifested by the lowest animals—not simply in a sudden impulse which revenges itself at the moment for pain inflicted or wrongs done, but in a dull resentment which may smoulder for months, waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself, and which, when that comes, bursts out into a raging flame. There are thousands of instances on record in which this has happened, especially in the case of monkeys which have been kept tame. And, perhaps, the personal experience of most persons can furnish an example of the truth of this allegation.

The social instincts are plainly seen in many of the lower animals; not, of course, in that perfect form in which they are met with in man; but the difference here again is one of degree only. Many animals experience pleasure in the company of their fellows, and are unhappy when separated. They will show sympathy one for another, and even perform services for each other's benefit. Some animals lie together in large numbers, and never separate except for a very short time, and then only for a purpose which they clearly understand. This is the case with sheep, rats, American monkeys, and also with rooks,

jackdaws, and starlings. Darwin observes: "Everyone must have noticed how miserable horses, dogs, sheep, etc., are when separated from their companions, and what affection the two former kind will show on their re-union. It is curious to speculate upon the feelings of a dog who will rest peacefully for hours in a room with his master or any of the family without the least notice being taken of him, but who, if left for a short time by himself, barks and howls dismally." Here we find the origin of the social faculty in man. It is very easy to imagine the course of development which this must have taken in order to have culminated in the highest form as we see it in the human species. The psychical powers appeared first in an incipient form, and then gradually developed through a long course of ages, until they attained their height in humanity. Other influences, such as the power of language, furthered the development, these powers themselves being the result of the process of evolution. The question how far language is confined to man is one of great interest to the student of evolution. In replying to the inquiry, "What is the difference between the brute and man?" Max Müller says: "Man speaks, and no brute has ever uttered a word. Language is our Rubicon, and no brute has ever crossed it." The following excerpt from the introduction to Agassiz's *Contributions to the Natural History of the United States* has an important bearing upon this point: "The intelligibility of the voice of animals to one another, and all their actions connected with such calls, are also a strong argument of their perceptive power, and of their ability to act spontaneously and with logical sequence in accordance with these perceptions. There is a vast field open for

investigation in the relations between the voice and the actions of animals, and a still more interesting subject of inquiry in the relationship between the cycle of intonations which different species of animals of the same family are capable of uttering, and which, so far as I have yet been able to trace them, stand to one another in the same relations as the different, so-called, families of languages."

On all sides the candid and impartial observer may behold undoubted evidence in favour of the doctrine of evolution. We see it in the various changes of the solar system. There are (1) fire mists; (2) globes of gas; (3) condensed oceans; (4) crust formation; (5) mountains and rivers, and (6) its present phenomena. What is this but evolution? Is it not a manifestation of changes from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex, and from the chaotic to the consolidated? The same principle is illustrated, as before indicated, by the science of embryology, with its clearly-marked stages of development—the fish, reptile, bird, quadruped, and, finally, the human form. The relationship of the species gives its proof in favour of the evolution theory. The different types of to-day had their one starting-point, the variations now seen having been produced by altered conditions. Moreover, we find that in the process of evolution some organs in animals become useless, while others change their use, thus proving that the animal kingdom possesses structural affinities, and that the subsequent differentiation depends upon the opportunity afforded for evolution. Then, again, man's ability in diverting animal instincts and intelligence from their original sphere, as shown in the training of certain of the lower animals; in improving

the eye as an optical instrument; in rendering less antagonistic the natures and instincts we discover in different species constantly at war with each other, all point to one process—that of evolution.

There is the old sentimental objection to this theory, that it is humiliating to think that we have evolved from forms lower down in the scale of animal life. But, as Dr. Page points out, there is nothing in this view necessarily degrading: "If, in virtue of some yet unexplained process, man has derived his descent *from* any of the lower orders, he is clearly not of them—his higher structural adaptations and improvable reason defining at once the speciality of his place and the responsibility of his functions. It can be no degradation to have descended from some antecedent form of life, any more than it can be an exaltation to have been fashioned directly from the dust of the earth. There can be nothing degrading or disgusting in the connection which nature has obviously established between all that lives, and those who employ such phrases must have but a poor and by no means very reverent conception of the scheme of creation. The truth is, there is nothing degrading in nature save that which, forgetful of its own functions, debases and degrades itself. The jibing and jeering at the idea of an 'ape-ancestry,' so often resorted to by the ignorant, has in reality no significance to the mind of the philosophic naturalist. There is evidently one structural plan running throughout the whole of vitality, after which its myriad members have been ascensively developed, just as there is one great material plan pervading the planetary system; and science merely seeks to unfold that plan, and to determine the principles upon which

it is constructed. If there be no generic connection between man and the order that stands next beneath him, there is at all events a marvellous similarity in structural organisation, and this similarity is surely suggestive of something more intimate than mere coincidence." Evolution, therefore, although unable to supply the solution to every problem presented to the student of nature, is, so far as can be discovered at the present day, the truest theory of man and the universe, and is sufficient for all practical purposes. Further, it satisfies the intellect as no other theory does, and is assuredly more reasonable than that of special creation.

One question of great importance will probably suggest itself to those who have given the theory of evolution much consideration. It is this: What is to be the position of things, and especially of man, in the future? Will there be evolved higher beings after him, as he is higher than those who preceded him? He stands now as the lord of creation; but so stood many mighty reptiles of the past in their day and generation. Could they have reasoned, would they not have concluded that they were the final end of creation, and that all that had gone before was simply to prepare for their entrance into the world? In that they would have erred; and it may be asked, Shall we not equally err if we hastily decide that no higher being than man can ever come on earth; that he is, and will ever remain, the highest of organic existences? Now, the cases are not quite analogous, as a little reflection will show. The earlier animals were entirely the creatures of evolution; man is largely the director of the process. He can, by his intellect, control the law itself, just as he bends gravitation to

his will, though, in a sense, he is as much subject to its power as is the earth on which he treads. Before man arose, the animals and plants then existing were moulded by the great power operating upon them from within and without; hence the form they took and the functions they performed. When they had to contend with an unfortunate environment, they became modified; or, failing that, they disappeared. Now, man, by his mental resource, can supply natural deficiencies, and thus he does not defeat evolution, but directs its current into a new channel. He can bring his food from a distance, and thus avoid scarcity in the country where he dwells; he can successfully contend against climate, disease, and a thousand other destructive agencies which might otherwise sweep him away. It is, therefore, no longer a contest between different physical powers, but between physical and mental. No higher physical development only is likely to occur, because it would not meet the case, since, however perfect it might be, it could not hold its own in the struggle for existence against man with his intellect. The development in the future must be one of mind, not of body. We do not, consequently, look forward to the time when organised beings, higher and more perfect physically than man, shall take his place on the earth; but we do believe that a period will arrive when the intellectual powers shall be refined, expanded, and exalted beyond anything of which at present we can form a conception.

IMMORTALITY: A REPLY TO DR. A. W. MOMERIE

DR. MOMERIE'S work upon Immortality is an exposition of what are termed "advanced views" in reference to the theory of a future life. The work probably will not be of any polemical service to those who entertain the orthodox belief as to the existence and ultimate abode of a soul, inasmuch as the Doctor repudiates many of the more prominent stock-in-trade reasons which are urged in favour of that belief. In fact, the sermons, of which the book is composed, contain well-reasoned-out indictments against the once popular notions which bear upon man's alleged immortality. For instance, the Doctor contends that heaven and hell are not places, but conditions; and he points out that the theological teachings as to future rewards and punishments are not only thoroughly untenable, but that they are "unjust and immoral." He also candidly admits that the belief in a future life is not necessary to the formation and retention of excellence of character. He says: "I am bound in common honesty to admit that occasionally we find persons who can do without it. We find men here and there who, with no hope for the future, are yet living noble, useful, self-denying lives, spending and being spent for others, taking the most enthusiastic interest in all

that concerns the well-being of their fellow-men, content to work and to suffer, that humanity may be better off when they themselves shall have passed (as they think) into non-existence. All honour to such men." This was also the opinion of J. S. Mill, Tyndall, Huxley, and Darwin.

Unfortunately, Dr. Momerie does not appear to have grasped the Rationalist's position as to a future life. He observes: "Just think what the denial of immortality means." But the Rationalist offers no such denial. He simply regards the supposed immortality of conscious beings as a subject which, by its very nature, and by the nature of our mentality, it is impossible to give a definite opinion upon either *pro* or *con*. Still, he considers that, from a reasonable and scientific standpoint, there is no evidence to justify the dogmatic assertion that there *is* "a life beyond the grave." Before we can accept as true the allegation that we shall continue to live after passing through the ordeal termed death, we must have some knowledge of the conditions of that supposed existence, and as to whether they are suitable to mankind. But, up to the present, we have not met anyone who possesses the required knowledge, and, therefore, no information is forthcoming as to the nature of a future life. If there is presumptive evidence in favour of a future life, the most that can be reasonably argued is that there *may be* such a life. "If a man die, shall he live again?" is a problem to the solution of which the philosopher has devoted his wisdom, the poet has dedicated his poetry, and the scientist has directed his attention; and yet it remains unsolved. Rationalists, therefore, agree with Thomas Carlyle when he says: "What went before and what will follow me I regard

as two impenetrable curtains which hang down at the two extremities of human life, and which no man has drawn aside." The Rationalist endorses the words of Sir Edwin Arnold when he states in his work, *Death and Afterwards*:—

> Man is not by any means convinced as yet of his immortality. All the great religions have in concert, more or less positively, affirmed it to him; but no safe logic proves it, and no entirely accepted voice from some farther world proclaims it.....We ought to be reassured, therefore, rather than disconcerted, by the fact that nobody can pretend to understand and depict any future life, for it would prove sorely inadequate if it were at present intelligible. To know that we cannot now know is an immense promise of coming enlightenment. ....To our bodily senses, no doubt, and to physical science, which is limited by them, human existence seems to end with death (pp. 8, 25, and 52).

Dr. Momerie urges as a strong reason for believing in immortality that a desire exists in the human race for "a life beyond the grave." He states that "a desire so profound and so persistent must have been purposely implanted in our hearts by him who made us. We may, therefore, regard it as a prophecy. It is the pledge of its own fulfilment. There is a scientific axiom to the effect that the existence of an organ implies the existence of a field for its operation." Science, however, has demonstrated that organs exist in the human body for which no purpose has been discovered. Even the Doctor himself admits that the rudimentary or abortive organs found in human beings "are frequently a source of mischief." The old notion that, because a person forms a certain conception, therefore a corresponding reality exists, has long been exploded. For example, take the illustration of the general conception of the dragon. We may be able to trace the idea to some extinct

animal, but that does not prove the truth of the belief that such an animal ever existed. If an artist painted a picture of the Devil, it is perfectly certain that the "Prince of Darkness" never sat for the portrait. The conception which was formed as to the origin of the universe and man has been shown by modern researches to be absolutely groundless in reality. Further, it should be remembered that how far this desire for a future life is real depends upon the nature and conditions which belong to and surround it. Is it to be in every particular a continuation of our present existence? If so, there are thousands who have no desire for its perpetuation. On the other hand, if the future life is to be entirely different, where does the immortality of the present one come in? Those who argue that, without an endless future, this life is not worth having must regard it as being exceedingly defective. Why, then, should its continuation be desired? Moreover, is it possible to long or desire for that of which we know nothing? I think not. Every one's experience proves that it does not follow that, because we desire a certain thing, therefore we shall possess it. Many of us desire universal happiness, justice for all, absence of abject poverty, and a fair distribution of wealth; but no such conditions exist. Still, it is said that this general desire for immortality should be accounted for, which can easily be done. Of course, there is some connection between desires and their realisation in reference to things that are attainable, for the very desire may be a factor in the sum of the causes that enable us to realise our ideal. But the mere fact of having the desire is no evidence that its realisation will follow. No doubt the instinctive love of life found in man

explains, to a large extent, the desire for immortality. In most cases, however, the desire is not for another life, but rather for the continuation of the one we have. And even in this case the desire will depend upon our present condition. If we are physically healthy, have a fair share of comforts, and are surrounded by those we love, there would be few, if any, who would wish to depart "to be no more seen." If, on the other hand, our bodies are diseased, and misery and starvation exclude all sunshine from our lives, then complete extinction would be to many "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

Besides, the Doctor does not appear to have taken into consideration the fact that we have no guarantee that the future life, if there be one, will be an improvement upon this. It does not avail to say that injustice prevails in this world which will be remedied there. In what lies the remedy? Men who are unjust here may be unjust elsewhere, and the human selfishness of this world will but be transferred to another, if the same beings pass from one to the other. It is no certain proof to say, as the Doctor does, that a God of justice will see that right is done. The same God, it is assumed, will reign there as here, and most certainly he does not prevent injustice being done upon a very extensive scale in this world. Why, then, should his plan of government be altered in the next? The assumption that it will be is based upon no evidence whatever, and is even in direct opposition to the declaration so often made that God does not, and cannot, change. Moreover, we know nothing whatever with respect to the conditions of a future life, and can, consequently, predicate nothing with regard to the state of society there. Great

numbers of men who die pass away with the worst passions of human nature exercising supreme control over the rest of their faculties. How can these be expected to form, or even to take part in, a pure and unselfish society, where each man is supposed to love others as well as himself? Endless existence and interminable motion may be the laws of thought which it is impossible to banish from our minds, although we are unable to conceive of an infinite past which is involved in the statement. But it is otherwise with the *forms* of existence that possess life: these can be conceived of as coming to an end. Intense heat or intense cold may terminate all living things in a brief space of time. The truth is, there is no demonstrated evidence that any part of the compound being called man will

> "flourish in immortal youth,
> Unhurt amidst the war of elements,
> The wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds."

One great defect of Dr. Momerie's defence of immortality is that he substitutes assumption for proof, and relies upon emotion rather than upon reason. He appears to have rested his case too much upon the fact that belief may obtain where certainty is absent. It is true that belief may exist where certainty is not, but only as belief; and then, to make it reasonable, the belief must not be *opposed* to knowledge and experience, which belief in a life "beyond the tomb" certainly is. It should be borne in mind that the doctrine of immortality does not signify merely continuity of existence, for that applies to the material universe. The theological idea of immortality means continuation of life in the same individual, a condition of which we know nothing. Death is a

state the very opposite to that of life; both, therefore, cannot be conceived as being one. A living-dead man is a contradiction, for it is a self-evident fact that, if man always lived, he would never die. Death probably occurs every moment, but we have no instance of the perpetual continuation of one living individual. A body in action must be present somewhere; but when it has disappeared in the grave, and gone to dust, it is no longer an organised body. It cannot act where it is, in the grave, for there its functions have ceased; it cannot act elsewhere, because it is not there to act. This appears as self-evident as that the whole is greater than the part.

Dr. Momerie, using the term "soul" as synonymous with that of mind, defines the former to be "a simple, single, identical being: an invisible, persistent something that sees and hears, and feels and thinks, and wills and loves." Here it is alleged that the soul is a "being," although it is stated to be "invisible"; and that it possesses many of the same physical and mental characteristics which belong to the human organisation. Not a particle of evidence does the Doctor adduce to prove his allegation. Science has clearly proved that the functions mentioned above belong to the brain, which, when injured in any way, impairs the operation of the said functions. In proof of this, we may refer to persons in lunatic asylums who have diseased brains, whose judgment is dethroned, and whose reason has deserted them. Has the soul in their case lost its power of control? If so, what is its value? When a drunkard becomes intoxicated, and loses all control over himself, has his soul lost its power? Again, as regards the "soul" leaving his body: if it does so immediately

at death, does it go straight to heaven or hell, without waiting for the judgment day? If it does not leave the body till some time after death, how can a decaying body retain the soul? Further, when does this alleged soul enter the body? In infancy? Then why does the child at that stage of its life exhibit such a low degree of intelligence? If, however, the soul is not allied with the body until it arrives at maturity, both physical and intellectual development go on without its aid. The fact is, the human mind is infantile in the child, juvenile in the youth, mature in the adult, feeble in the aged, deranged by disease of its material organ the brain, and at death it disappears. The origin of the so-called soul is just that of the body, and no separation, as far as modern science shows, is possible. Mental life commences with physical life, and both are immature together. We learn to use our intellectual powers in the same way as we acquire the more perfect use of our muscular powers—by experience and practice. Each must begin and end with the somatic organs upon which they depend. Besides, it is an admitted fact that a nervous system is necessary to mental phenomena. As George Henry Lewes has stated, "Without a nervous system there could be nothing like what we know as feeling." Samuel Laing observes: "So far as science gives any positive knowledge as to the relations of mind to matter, it amounts to this: That all we call mind is indissolubly connected with matter through the grey cells of the brain and other nervous ganglia. This is positive." The position, therefore, is this: No nerves, no feeling; no matter, no mind; no brain, no thought; no organisation, no life; and without organic activity consciousness is unknown.

A further fallacy underlying the Doctor's pleading is in his assuming that life, mind, thought, etc., are entities. Now, these are not things *per se*, but conditions of matter which result from certain combinations of material parts. Life is not a thing any more than death, and thought is no more an entity than is digestion. The discovery of the correlation of force has completely revolutionised our knowledge as to the nature of thought and mental action. Light, heat, electricity, magnetism, etc., are now known to be forms of force, and so are life and mind. Professor Huxley has shown the fallacy of supposing life to be an entity. Oxygen and hydrogen unite in certain proportions, and form water—that is, the water is the outcome of the union of these elements. So, in certain other combinations, an organism is formed, and the result is life. The life did not pre-exist, for it had no existence at all until the organic body produced it, and then it made the appearance simply as a correlated force. The production of mind is caused in a similar way. What occurs here is a correlation of force—that is, one form of force is converted into another, heat into light, electricity into magnetism, and some one or more of them into life and mind. The origin of mind, therefore, is like the origin of heat or electricity—viz., correlation. The force itself thus correlated may have been eternal in some one or more of its forms, but the particular form in which it is manifested is simply the result of correlation. Nothing is called into actual existence but a phenomenon, having no more permanent individual existence than the flash of lightning or the peal of thunder. We kindle a fire and heat is produced, or we light the gas and the room becomes illuminated; but where

was the heat or the light before the combustion upon which it depends was brought about? Certainly not in existence in the form in which it is now seen. When the fire goes out the heat ceases, and when the gas is turned off there is no more light. No one thinks of asking what has become of either, and yet people talk of life as being an entity, and they discuss the whereabouts of mind before and after the existence of organic substance, upon which the whole thing depends.

Dr. Momerie emphasises the continuity of man's identity as an important argument in favour of his immortality. He urges that, although the material of the body changes several times during life, memory continues. This is so; but in no instance has it been shown that man, when in his normal condition, lost his identity at any period while those changes were going on. Even scars on the body remain amid all its mutations, simply because the particles of that body are replaced by others which serve the same purpose. Dr. Maudsley puts this fact very clearly. He says: "When we are told that every part of the body is in a constant change, that within a certain period every particle of it is renewed, and yet that, amid these changes, a man feels that he remains essentially the same, we perceive nothing inconsistent with the idea of the action of a material organ; for it is not absurd to suppose that in the brain the new series of particles take the pattern of those which they replace, as they do in other organs and tissues which are continually changing their substance, yet preserve their identity." Equally useless as an argument in favour of immortality is the Doctor's reference to the changes of the caterpillar from a lower to a

higher state of existence. The caterpillar becomes transformed into the butterfly before our eyes. The butterfly is an improvement upon the caterpillar in point of organisation, but in every other respect they are both similar. Both are material, and each is liable to destruction and decay. The soul, however, that is supposed to be evolved from the human form at death is said to be immaterial and immortal; and, therefore, totally unlike that material organisation from which it has escaped. The change is not observed. The body dies, and the elements of which it was composed pass into other forms—that is all we see, and all that we know. Beyond this, everything is mere conjecture and vague speculation.

As to the hope indulged in that in a future life we shall be again united to those we love, that in no way affects the truth or otherwise of immortality. If we are to sleep for ever, we shall so sleep despite the belief in immortality; and, if we are to live for ever, we shall so live despite the belief that possibly death ends all. It must also be remembered that, if man possess a soul, that soul will be the better through being in a body that has been properly trained; and, if there is to be a future life, that life will be the better if the higher duties of the present one have been fully and honestly performed. The Rationalist is, therefore, safe so far, inasmuch as he recognises it to be his first duty to cultivate a healthy body, and to endeavour to make the best, in its highest sense, of the present existence. In reference to the supposition that we may be punished in case we are wrong; if there be a just God, before whom we are to appear to be judged, surely he will never punish those to whom he has not vouchsafed the faculty of seeing beyond the grave,

because they honestly avowed that their mental vision was limited to this side of the tomb. Thus we may feel quite safe as regards any futurity that may be worth having. If the present be the only life, then it will be all the more valuable if we give it our undivided attention. If, on the other hand, there is to be another life, then, in that case, we shall have won the right to its advantages through having been faithful to our convictions and just to our fellows. As to the feeling of consolation which is said to be derived from the belief in a future life, the Rationalist is safe upon this point also. For, if there be a life beyond the grave, he has the conviction that good conduct on earth will entitle him to the realisation of its fullest pleasure. Moreover, this conviction is not marred by the belief that the majority of the human race will be condemned to a fate "which humanity cannot conceive without terror, nor contemplate without dismay." Therefore, despite the hopes, the expectations, and the speculations concerning immortality, the demonstration of its reality has not been forthcoming; and, in the absence of that demonstration, the possibility may be fairly granted that, when "life's fitful fever" is over, "the rest is silence."

THE PHILOSOPHY OF UNBELIEF

WHILE there can be no reasonable doubt as to the rapid increase of unbelief in all phases of modern life, differences of opinion may obtain as to the nature and authority of this unbelief. For instance, it may be asked, Can unbelief have a philosophy? According to many persons who have been trained in what is termed orthodoxy, and who profess to accept the popular teachings of the Christian faith, the answer would be a most emphatic negative. But the rational observer of the development of modern thought will doubtless think otherwise, and consider that he has ample reasons for the conclusion at which he has arrived. If there is a philosophy of belief, why should there not be a philosophy of unbelief? The one may be true and the other false; still both may be formulated in philosophic terms. Unbelief has been so long branded as a crime, and so persistently looked upon as a sin against God and as an enemy to all human society, that the world has come largely to argue that it has no philosophic basis. Ever and anon it is being declared from the thousands of pulpits in the land that unbelief is the great bane of the age, and that what mankind needs is more faith in dogmas, although an orthodox preacher himself frankly declared in reference to some of them: "Reason stands aghast, and Faith herself is half confounded."

Unbelief is not only condemned as being a crime, but it is pronounced as the worst of crimes. The unbeliever is viewed as a man who voluntarily or wilfully rejects the light of truth, who clings to error knowing it to be evil, and who consequently deserves no mercy of any God, and no consideration on the part of his fellow-man. The very name "Unbeliever" or "Sceptic" is looked upon by some as a byword or reproach. Unbelief is a sort of intellectual bugbear by which the simple-minded are held in the worst kind of slavery—that of intellectual bondage. Whenever a man begins to think differently from the Church, a hue-and-cry of "Infidelity" is raised against him, and many are compelled, if they would preserve their positions in business and retain the good opinion of their fellow-men, to retrace their steps and pretend to enter again the fold of believers, where doubt comes not and where inquiry has no place. For let a man be guided by the dogmas of antiquity; let him declare that reason is a blind guide, and logic a weapon of the Devil; let him denounce with all the power he can command the great and illustrious men of the earth who have doubted the various theologies of the world, and such a man's respectability is safe in this world, and his salvation is regarded as being secured in the next. "Only believe," says the poet of Methodism—

> "Only believe, your sins forgiven;
> Only believe, and yours is heaven."

No one can believe everything, and some must consequently be unbelievers in all that which does not fall within the range of his or her thought. Want of faith, therefore, so far from being criminal, is a necessary condition of the human mind. No one can escape it, do what he may. The Christian is an

unbeliever to the Mohammedan, the Buddhist, the Parsee, and other religious devotees, as they are all unbelievers to him and to each other. The question here is not which of these systems, or whether any one of them, is true; but the point to be observed is that the advocate of each disbelieves in the dogma of the other, showing that unbelief is a necessity, since the various faiths are all in some respects antagonistic. The Agnostic is, of course, an unbeliever; but is any Christian minister in the world less so? The fact is, both the Rationalist and the Christian disbelieve in what the other teaches. Why, then, does the Christian consider himself justified in applying to the Rationalist an epithet which is used in an offensive sense, and resent the same epithet when applied to himself? The Christian, no doubt, will reply that his opinions are true, and those of the Rationalist false. But that is just the point in dispute, and has no right to be assumed; and, besides, might not the Rationalist justify the use of the word in the same way?

Before unbelief, even in religion, can be dispensed with advantageously—and even then, perhaps, it could not rationally be discarded—three qualifications must be shown to be possessed by the believer who talks in the language of ordinary Christian men. First, he must be infallible; secondly, he must be strictly honest, for infallibility does not necessarily imply honesty; and, thirdly, his system must be perfect. In the absence of any one of these, he may mislead those who listen to and follow his teaching. And no man can possibly have a right to proclaim a system, which he demands should be accepted under pain of penalties in this world, and worse penalties in some world to

come, unless he is prepared with demonstrative proof that he and his system are possessed of these three qualifications. With regard to the first, no man can profess seriously to claim infallibility but the Pope of Rome; and his claim is not only not attempted to be made good, but we are told that it must be accepted without any proof whatever. Besides, nearly half the Christians themselves not only dispute this claim, but denounce it in language as strong as that which they apply to unbelievers. In fact, infallibility could only exist in connection with Omniscience, because to be certain that one could have made no mistake it is essential that he should have a perfect knowledge of everything that is in any and every part of the universe. If there be any one fact or circumstance with which he is unacquainted, this very fact or circumstance may contain an additional truth not present to his mind, which, if known, would considerably modify existing views.

The Protestant, however, does not even pretend to claim infallibility, and, therefore, he foregoes a great part of his authority. With him the certainty of being right is transferred to some extent from the individual to the system, and hence, although personally he lays no claim to being infallible, he still demands implicit faith in his teachings. Infallibility in his case is not in his own mind, nor in the head of the Church, but in the Bible. But, even if this claim were established, it would not be sufficient, for an infallible book would be of little value without an infallible interpreter, because a million different infallible minds will deduce a million different conclusions, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine of them being erroneous—and, perhaps, the other

one also—which multiplies the chances of error so extensively that the alleged infallibility disappears. But supposing that the infallibility of the original version of the Bible were conceded, nothing would thereby be gained, since such an infallible original is no longer in existence. The volume that we have is simply a translation executed by fallible, erring men. Thus the first qualification necessary to the disposal of unbelief we find to be absent. The second is that such teachers must be honest. It is only stating a well-known truism to say that all men are not honest, particularly in theological matters. Insincerity is the great curse of the Church, too many of its members endeavouring to make people think they believe creeds and doctrines in which, in reality, they have no practical faith whatever. Unless, therefore, we could be quite certain, beyond a shadow of doubt, as to the conscientious honesty of the infallible teacher, even his infallibility would prove of no avail. In business matters men always endeavour to act upon the principle that honesty is the most important element in life. They will not, as a rule, trust money in the hands of another person unless thoroughly convinced both of his honesty and of his capability to comply with the terms of the agreement made. Yet many of these same men will stake their all in what they term hereafter—the supposed eternal welfare of their souls—on the *ipse dixit* of a priest or minister, without any guarantee of his honesty or competence to perform his brilliant promises. Truly man is a remarkable being, and, under the influence of theology, his ways are marvellously strange and past finding out. The very course which he applauds in mundane transactions he not only ignores in religious pro-

ceedings, but adopts the very opposite. And yet we are told that the two lines of conduct—secular and religious—are harmonious. In spite of all reckless condemnation to the contrary, unbelief is a necessity of the human mind, to escape which is altogether impossible.

There is but one state of mind in which it may be said unbelief can have but little or no place, and that is in a condition of total ignorance. Perfect knowledge would, of course, remove all unbelief of truth; and even with it there would be unbelief as regards error. But, as this condition is unattainable, it need not be discussed. Total ignorance does not disbelieve, because there is, in that case, nothing present to the mind in reference to which unbelief can be exercised. This will go a long way to explain the fact that, in times of supreme ignorance, unbelief was comparatively unknown. Priestcraft held its sway, mental stagnation obtained, and men and women were blind believers in, and followers of, the then prevailing errors. But the moment progress, from the condition of ignorance, commenced, new forms of thought became present to the mind, new opinions were perceived, new theories sprang up, investigation took place, and unbelief became a necessary consequent. And this unbelief will be sure to increase with increasing knowledge. In childhood the first impressions we receive we naturally enough imagine to be indisputably correct, whether in religion, in philosophy, or in the ordinary commonplace affairs of life. The first impressions as to religion and to philosophy we receive from our parents or teachers, and hence tradition frequently deceives us. As Dryden says:—

"By education most have been misled,
So we believe because we are so bred;
The priest continues what the nurse began,
And thus the boy imposes on the man."

In the morning of existence theories in abundance crowd in upon the mind, the major part of them only to be subsequently dismissed as untenable, and we become, perforce of necessity, unbelievers to much that is presented to the mind. Each individual will probably accept some different theory to the others; but all will be unbelievers in those notions which have been rejected. This unbelief will deepen with increasing knowledge, because, the more we know, the greater the variety of the theories that will present themselves to the mind, and the larger, therefore, the number of these that will have to be rejected. It will follow, as a necessary consequence, that the unbelief will be commensurate with the knowledge possessed. It is quite possible that some truth may be rejected by a man as error; but that does not affect the question under consideration. The real position is that unbelief in the abstract is a necessity of the constitution of the human mind, and the more the mind is instructed and cultivated, the more extensive will be the unbelief. Thus Scepticism arises from the very nature of things, and has its foundation in the universal mentality of the race; and, instead of deploring this fact, it is one that should be rejoiced at, because it is a safeguard against error—it stimulates and enriches human thought, and ennobles the intellectual character of mankind. As Tennyson writes:—

"There is more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

Seeing that there is so much that must come before

the human mind to be at once dismissed, and that so many various and conflicting theories will present themselves before the intellect of every person who thinks upon ever so limited a scale, the greater portion of which will doubtless have to be rejected, our duty in regard to the matter is as evident as the sun at noonday. Truth is a treasure of which all men are professedly in search, and all should try to discover and take hold of as much of it as possible; and the only way in which this can be done is by rejecting the error—or that which appears to the searcher to be such, for his own intellectual powers are the only tests he can apply to ascertain what is truth and what is falsehood. Hence he must reject that which appears to him to be irrational, and thus so far he becomes an unbeliever. If it is said that this unbelief refers only to error, the question will arise, What is error? For is it not clear that, as no two minds are constituted alike, and as no two persons can possibly follow out, in every particular and in precisely the same manner, the same line of thought and investigation, the conclusions reached cannot be the same always in the case of different individuals? It is possible that all will discover some truth; but truth, like man, is many-sided; and, hence, some things which seem phases of truth to one man will be classed with error by another. Rationalism teaches the great fundamental truth—namely, that man has an absolute right to think freely, unfettered by tradition and uncontrolled by creeds and dogmas. This is the essence of all true thinking; for no one can think successfully in shackles, and truth can never be properly reached while thought is in chains. Protestantism boasts that it not only allows the right of

private judgment, but that such right is its cardinal principle and watchword. Now, true private judgment means the right to arrive at any opinion which can be legitimately reached by the laws of thought and the canons of logic, or the term is a misleading misnomer. It was the violation of this principle that made the conduct of the Protestant reformers so thoroughly inconsistent. They robbed private judgment of its real essence by compelling its conclusions to harmonise with their own, and thus limiting that freedom which is absolutely necessary to private judgment.

A presumption that an opinion which is sought to be suppressed is an erroneous one will not be sufficient to justify its suppression; because, in the first place, strong presumption is not proof, and, in the second place, very strong presumptions have existed in the past in favour of the falsity of certain opinions, which only a small minority held, but which afterwards turned out to be true. The Roman Catholic denies the right of private judgment altogether, and yet, strangely enough, he always makes an appeal to it when seeking to make converts. If a man says, "I believe in the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore I deny that you have any such right as that of private judgment," I ask at once, "Why are you a Roman Catholic?" He will, no doubt, proceed forthwith to give his reasons, thereby admitting that he has exercised his own private judgment in the matter—the very thing which he refuses me the right to do. There is, and can be, no fixed standard of belief for all men, unless the right of private judgment be entirely given up; nor scarcely then, as a matter of fact, for the standard itself will have to be accepted or rejected according to evidence.

The Nonconformists who were persecuted even unto death were, like all other believers in creeds and dogmas, unable to resist the temptation of oppressing others when they had an opportunity. The love of rule and of exercising it tyrannically over conscience is common to all theologies and all theologians alike—to those of old Paganism, mediæval Christianity, and Mohammedanism. The doctrine that a wrong belief, the holding of an erroneous creed, will lead to the consignment of the soul to eternal fire, "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched," prompts some men (and seems to justify them in so doing) to exert all their powers trying to preserve their fellow-men from becoming a prey to Satan and from being irretrievably lost to God. Thus the bigot has been always found prepared to plead, in extenuation of his intolerance, his zeal on behalf of souls. Hence he has always been ready to—

> "Deal damnation round the land
> On each I deem thy foe."

All persecution for unbelief is a crime, and should be condemned as such. No man, or society of men, can have the right to impose any restriction upon liberty of thought or speech. Whoever persecutes "for conscience' sake" invades the dearest rights and privileges of the human race, and really endangers and imperils its highest and most cherished interests.

The Nonconformity of the present day appears to be ashamed of its opinions. Instead of boldly adhering to the true principle of private judgment, no matter whither it may lead, it adopts a policy of reservation. The modern Dissenter scarcely deems it worth his while to combat the errors of ecclesiasticism and sacerdotalism; he himself is half a Churchman;

and he now comes forward as the antagonist and opponent of what he terms the "Unbelief of the age." But what is this Unbelief of which we hear so much? Is it not the logical carrying out and application of the same principles which had given the early reformers an excuse—a legitimate and valid one—for endeavouring to subvert and overthrow Romanism and its man-destroying superstitions and prostrations of the intellect to dogma and faith. If the principle of free inquiry is once given to the world, and admitted by mankind, it is absurd and illogical for any new "minister" to attempt to forge new intellectual shackles, or to say to the human mind, "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther!" Whoever is opposed to this right is an enemy to human freedom. As Milton has written:—

> "This is true liberty, when free-born men,
> Having to advise the public, may speak free;
> Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise;
> Who neither can, nor will, may hold his peace:
> What can be juster in a State than this?"

But to disbelieve is not only a right, it is also a duty; for every man is under an obligation to deny, and to do his best, in a legitimate manner, to destroy, that which, after careful and deliberate examination, appears to him to be false. No doubt the orthodox believers fear the logical exercise of this rational principle, simply because they are afraid that their own views will not stand the test; but this really ought to be evidence to them that there is something unsound somewhere in their contentions. There is a fashion in these matters, as in the cut of a coat, and the great masses of society do not like to be out of the fashion. But fashion will seldom stand

criticism. "There is more power," said an old writer, "in an ounce of custom than in a ton of argument." Now, this is just the state of things that requires to be changed. Moreover, few will acknowledge that they are guided by it, which is a tacit admission that it cannot be defended. The majority profess to exercise their private judgments, to think and to investigate, and yet they are bound hard and fast in the chain of a despotic custom—which proves that they, too, recognise the right to differ, which is really the right of unbelief.

There can be no progress without unbelief, for disbelief in an old system must ever precede the introduction of a new one. Progress always implies change, and change is the outcome of unbelief in that which is old and no longer able to serve the world, added to what is considered to be a new truth. Thus we find that those who oppose unbelief are usually adverse to change of any kind; their motto is, "The same yesterday, to-day, and forever." Among such persons there exists a deep-rooted prejudice against everything that is new, and this stubborn clinging to the teachings of the past has sapped the very vitals of progress and perpetuated errors and hypocrisy to an unknown extent. The man who changes his views and embraces a conviction contrary to that which he was known previously to hold is usually stigmatised by all sorts of offensive epithets among his fellow-men, and often he is regarded as being a very dangerous character. Now, change—assuming that it is in the right direction—is always desirable, and such change must of necessity arise out of unbelief. No man can really and fairly trace the progress of human thought and opinion from the

crude and unformed ideas of the ancients up to the brilliant discoveries and marvellous inventions of the present day, without feeling grateful that his lot has been cast in these later times. First one erroneous notion and then another have been got rid of, until, although the old tree of error still stands, its branches are shrivelled, its trunk is decaying, and its root is loosening in the soil in which it stood so firmly a few centuries ago. And every step in the world's advancement has been brought about by unbelief. This fact is fully demonstrated by Buckle in his *History of Civilisation*. This eminent writer, after showing that, until doubt began, civilisation was impossible, and that the religious tolerance we now have has been forced from the clergy by the secular classes, states "that the act of doubting is the originator, or, at all events, the necessary antecedent, of all progress. Here we have that scepticism, the very name of which is an abomination to the ignorant, because it disturbs their lazy and complacent minds; because it troubles their cherished superstitions; because it imposes on them the fatigue of inquiry; and because it rouses even sluggish understandings to ask if things are as they are commonly supposed to be, and if all is really true which they from their childhood have been taught to believe. The more we examine this great principle of scepticism, the more distinctly shall we see the immense part it has played in the progress of European civilisation.....It may be said that to scepticism we owe the spirit of inquiry which, during the last two centuries, has gradually encroached on every possible subject; has reformed every department of practical and speculative knowledge; has weakened the authority of the privileged classes, and

thus placed liberty on a surer foundation; has chastised the despotism of princes; has restrained the arrogance of the nobles, and has even diminished the prejudices of the clergy. In a word, it is this which has remedied the three fundamental errors of the olden time—errors which made the people, in politics too confiding, in science too credulous, in religion too intolerant."

Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*, tells us that "nearly all the greatest intellectual achievements of the last three centuries have been preceded and prepared by the growth of scepticism.....The splendid discoveries of physical science would have been impossible but for the scientific scepticisms of the school of Bacon.....Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities; not till Mohammedan science and classical Freethought and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church, did the intellectual revival of Europe begin." Thus the lesson of history is that unbelief in the old has ever preceded the introduction of the new. Christianity itself came based upon the disbelief in Paganism, and the Pagans, feeling outraged at the proposed change, called the first Christians not only unbelievers, but even Atheists. Martin Luther disbelieved in the mysteries and mummeries of Roman Catholicism, and the result was what is called the Protestant Reformation. Copernicus and Galileo disbelieved in the Bible cosmogony, with its theory of the heavens; and this scepticism gave birth to correct views upon the great science of astronomy. Modern geologists reject the Bible story of creation, and the consequence is more faith in Nature's records than in the absurdities of the Christian Bible. In philosophy

the same thing has occurred over and over again, and also in the political world. Thus, unbelief has ever been the herald of change and improvement, while its enemy has always been that superstitious conservatism which eschews all advancement, frowns down every new discovery, and keeps its anchor firmly fixed in the errors of the past. With such persons gloom is more sacred than sunshine, and decay preferable to the opening violet shedding its fragrance in the morning air.

Unbelief is always spoken of as though it were a mere negation, whose only mission could be to spread doubt and to destroy. The consequence of this misconception is that Rationalists are looked upon as persons whose aim it is to pull down, without having any desire to reconstruct. The pious orthodox believer looks upon an unbeliever as a sort of modern Goth or Vandal, dangerous to the well-being of society, and to be avoided by all who care for the public good. These are the wild fanatical notions, born of theological delusions, which are held in reference to unbelievers. But such views are most erroneous, to say nothing of their injustice. Some of the greatest benefactors of the race who ever lived have been unbelievers—that is, they have rejected those creeds and dogmas which are clung to so tenaciously by the Church. "It is historically true," remarks J. S. Mill, "that a large proportion of infidels, in all ages, have been persons of distinguished integrity and honour.....Persons in greatest repute with the world both by virtues and attainments are well known, at least to their intimates, to be unbelievers.....It can do truth no good to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance

with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teachings has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected, the Christian faith" *(On Liberty)*. And Mill was quite right, for some of the noblest men and women who have adorned the history of their times, and given to the world a record of the most useful deeds, have been unbelievers. Lucretius, Spinoza, Goethe, Humboldt, Dr. Priestley, Newton, Voltaire, Paine, Robert Owen, Lyell, Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, and Harriet Martineau are prominent in the pantheon of the world's benefactors; and these were all unbelievers from the orthodox standpoint. In France and Germany nearly all the scientific men are heretics.

Unbelief is, of course, negative on the one side; but there is always another aspect of it to be seen, if one will only take the trouble to look fairly for it. Unbelief in one thing means belief in the opposite, and it is quite possible that such opposite may be the more worthy of the two. This is another instance how the word "unbelief" is used in a sense that is most certainly not justifiable, because it conveys an idea of reproach, and almost of crime; and those to whom it is applied are thereby singled out for ignominious attack and violent denunciation. It may probably be replied here that the word is only employed in this sense when it refers to disbelief in things which are infallibly true, and too sacred to be tampered with, and far too well established to admit of the possibility of doubt in regard to them. But the position here assumed is absurd, since things which can be demonstrated to be true beyond the possibility of doubt cannot be disbelieved. No sane man can disbelieve

in a proposition of Euclid, or even the simple statement that two and two make four. The fact, therefore, of the very existence of unbelief in regard to any matter proves that it has not been demonstrated to be true. As to infallibility, that idea has already been disposed of. Now, to say that anything is too sacred to be tampered with simply means that it is sacred in the eyes of those who accept it; for it cannot be sacred to him who disbelieves it. To assert that I am not at liberty to disbelieve in any dogma or principle because someone else holds it to be sacred is to say that he is infallible, and that I must, therefore, defer to his judgment, surrender my own right to think at all, and take my opinions ready-made from anyone who is arrogant enough to claim the right to dictate. Moreover, this view is self-destructive, because a half-dozen different bodies may each be claiming the same allegiance, and, as their views will probably be conflicting and irreconcilable, to believe the pretensions of the one would be to disbelieve the claims of the others. But, if a person disbelieves, he also believes: his disbelief is the negative side of his faith, and his belief is the positive side.

Disbelief in an error, or in that which is held to be an error, by any man involves belief in the opposite of the error, which is truth, or at all events that which is recognised as such by the one who receives it. To describe a man as an unbeliever without having regard to what it is that he disbelieves, and, consequently, to what he believes as the opposite of his unbelief, is not fair to him, and is equally unfair to those who from this description learn to estimate his views. Unbelief and belief must run hand in hand, and cannot be separated. Persons may differ, of course,

as to the sphere of their faith and doubt; but the one has no more right to be called a believer *par excellence* than has the other. All of us claim to have some truth on our side, and in that truth we are firm believers. Our faith in it is the basis of our disbelief in error, and the mainspring of our actions in the advocacy of our views and in the efforts we make to bring others to our own way of thinking. We are only destructionists so far as a pulling down and a clearing of the ground may be necessary to prepare the way for the new building that is to be erected. Just as Luther disbelieved in Romanism and sought to destroy it, in order to make way for Protestantism, so Rationalists to-day disbelieve in the errors of the Church, and are thereby inspired to work for the establishment of greater and grander truths than theology ever recognised or the Church ever possessed. The old Church called Luther an unbeliever, and it was right so far; but a large portion of society came to recognise him as a true believer. His positive work was the outcome of his unbelief, and but for that it could have had no existence. Christianity owes its existence to unbelief. If Christ and St. Paul had not rejected many of the teachings of paganism and Judaism, the religious change which it is alleged occurred two thousand years ago would in all probability never have taken place. Thus unbelief has ever been the precursor of a newer and truer faith; it is the herald of progress, the forerunner of improvement, and the harbinger of coming good.

Unbelief leaves the mind free to receive new truths. The greatest opponent that truth has ever had to contend with is bigotry. A black cloud hangs over the mind of the dogmatist, shutting out every

ray of the bright and gladdening beams of the sun of truth, and encircling all his mental powers in the deepest darkness. To such an one improvement is nearly impossible, and advancement in intellectual growth is never to be dreamed of. His motto is always, "As you were," and his watchword, if he has one, is like that of which Mackay preaches, "Backward, ye deluded nations; man to misery is born." When a man dogmatically asserts that he has found all the truth which can be found, and that his system contains perfect verity without any mixture of error, his views become stereotyped, and it is improbable that any change can take place in his opinions. His mind is not open to receive new light from any source whatever, and thought with him is a useless and vain operation, and investigation the quintessence of folly. For him to receive any new truth would be to admit that what he possessed before was in some way defective and imperfect, and this his creed protests against with the authority of an infallible mandate. His position is necessarily stationary; he stands just where his grandsires stood ages past, and where he would wish his descendants to remain for ages to come. Now surely unbelief is far in advance of such a condition as this, for it leaves its possessor, without bias and prejudice, waiting the new knowledge that is continually to be had for the seeking. It allows his mind full scope to grow and advance in wisdom, because he does not for one moment believe that he has reached a perfection beyond which it is impossible to proceed. In connection with unbelief there is always a certain amount of suspension of judgment—that is to say, there is such an absence of dogmatism that any new discovery

of science, any fresh thought in philosophy, or better and clearer ideas in religion, are always welcomed as an addition to the stores of knowledge already in possession. A calm repose rests on his mental powers: there is, to use the words of Harriet Martineau, a "clearness of moral purpose," which "naturally ensues"—a "healthy activity of the moral faculties." The unbeliever, not being biassed by any settled views which he thinks came from heaven, is ever ready to learn and be taught. There is about him a lofty liberty which he alone can enjoy. From whatever source the truth may come he is willing—nay, desirous—to receive it. He is ever ready, as Dr. Watts observes, to—

> "Seize on truth where'er 'tis found,
> On heathen or on Christian ground."

The principal argument against unbelief is based upon the supposition that we have an infallible guide, whereas the fact is that we neither have nor can have anything of the kind; and, what is more, if we had such a guide, we could not understand it, and therefore it would be no guide to us. All that man requires is a reasonable probability, and his nature is so constituted that he cannot command more. Besides, unbelief is not voluntary, and the power of belief is not under the control of the will. Belief is the result of conviction, conviction of evidence; and no man can reasonably believe either without or against evidence, or disbelieve in the face of evidence sufficiently strong to carry conviction. Opinions change, theories pass away; old faiths decay, and new ones appear in their places.

In connection with the Christian profession at the present time, we have an illustration of such incon-

sistency as is not to be found in any other of the great religions of the world. History fails to record in association with those faiths such a marked difference between profession and action as we discover in the Christian Church. In Confucianism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, there is a persistent and earnest effort to regulate personal conduct in accordance with the alleged sayings and injunctions of their respective founders. But it is not so with Christianity. Where are the professing Christians to-day who even make the attempt to adopt the advice, practice, and precepts ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth? He was in every sense opposed to this world, and, in most emphatic terms, he denounced its enjoyments, its pride, its requirements, and particularly its riches. With him, heaven was of greater importance than earth, submission a higher duty than resistance, and poverty a greater virtue than wealth. He urged that practice was more valuable than profession, and that the grace of God was more efficacious than the ethics of man. Where, in the present day, do we find these views practically endorsed even by Christians? They are really disbelievers in what they proclaim as essential both for life and for death. Consistency, where indeed is thy blush? Before professing Christians condemn anyone for unbelief, let them show their genuine belief. Before they denounce Rationalists for rejecting that which they regard as error, let them prove that they practise that which they avow to be true. In the one case there is honesty of purpose and sincerity of conviction; in the other there is hypocrisy of profession and cant of fashion. Therefore, in the words of Polonius, we say to the Christian:—

"This above all, to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Wherein, then, consists the advantage of Unbelief? It is the symbol of mental freedom, the mark of intellectual dignity, the genius of cultivated reason. It shows the wisdom of being guided by progressive thought; it replaces old fancies with new realities; it holds fast that which reason and experience, not tradition and theology, decide to be true; it resists to the very utmost all despotic sway over the intellect, and it vindicates to the fullest extent the right of personal independence. The advantage of unbelief is shown in its inspiring mankind, in the words of Tyndall, not "to purchase intellectual peace at the price of intellectual death. The world is not without refugees of this description, nor is it wanting in persons who seek their shelter and try to persuade others to do the same. I would exhort you to refuse such shelter, and to scorn such base repose—to accept, if the choice be forced upon you, commotion before stagnation, the leap of the torrent before the stillness of the swamp. In the one there is, at all events, life, and, therefore, hope; in the other, none." This, then, is the essence of unbelief—not blind adherence to the past, but a loyal allegiance to the ever-present. If it be asked, "What should a person disbelieve?" the answer is, "Everything that he cannot believe after honest investigation." Rationalists condemn no one for not believing that which fails to commend itself to their reason and judgment. Hence, we do not believe in the necessity of priestcraft, the wisdom of allowing the Church to control the education of the young, the inferiority of women, the utility of death-

bed repentance, and finality in thought, morality, or religion. But we do believe in the right of individual opinion, unfettered reason, moral excellence, and intellectual discipline.

Unbelief asserts that every man and woman should be allowed absolute freedom to test all religions by the light of reason, and then either to accept one or reject all in accordance with the dictates of his or her understanding! By the revival of learning at the Renaissance a great impetus and new momentum were imparted to the human mind. The limits beyond which the Roman Church had for centuries prohibited any advance, on pain of the axe, the rack, the dungeon, and the stake, were then overstepped by the aspiring, emancipated intellect. Those old landmarks of the limits of former inquiry were justly despised, as the memorials of barbarian ignorance; and an appeal was made from the dogmas of sacerdotal authority to human nature, human science, and human thought. This latter, the intellect, again asserted its supremacy, as it had in olden time in Greece and Rome. A bright and radiant future was before it; it stood, as it were, upon an elevation from which it could take a wide and enlightened survey of the complicated interests of life. The master-spirits of the age soon proclaimed their deliverance from an irrational and degrading bondage, and demanded that the nations of the European world should come out of the darkness of old Rome's superstitions, emancipate themselves, and assert the dignity of their nature, and maintain the potency of their reason.

Mental freedom being secured, Unbelief refuses to be again fettered; it has gone on from discovery to discovery; it has tested the value of the cardinal

doctrines of orthodox Christianity—tested them and found them worthless. What has now become of the Genesaic theory of the creation of the world? what of the age of the earth? what of the origin of sin and evil? what of the doctrine of human depravity? what of the belief in the vicarious sufferings of Christ? what of the old notion of eternal punishment? what of the destruction of the world by the deluge? what of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt? what of the miracles of Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha? what of the age of the Pentateuch? what of the contention for the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures? what of the testimony respecting the Jesus Christ of the four Gospels? It is well known what science says to all these old-world doctrines. It simply discredits them—treats them as figments of the undisciplined imagination, and passes them by as unworthy of serious notice.

In professed Christian countries unbelief is thought to be incompatible with the possession and manifestation of the higher virtues of our nature. Orthodox devotees condemn those who cannot believe in the Christian religion as being destitute of the nobler qualities of mankind. And yet, when we look through the long roll of the world's greatest men—the giants of intellect, Nature's noblemen, the world's reformers—the brightest genius and the purest disinterestedness of character are to be found among unbelievers. If we carefully peruse the pages of history, we shall find unbelievers in orthodox theology standing conspicuously forth among Humanity's children, towering like mighty columns above the rest. By whom was the mighty civilisation of Greece, the strength and power of Rome, and the grandeur of yet earlier peoples from whom

even Greece and Rome learnt much—by whom was all this accomplished? Why, by those who were not believers in Christianity. That marvellous strength of will which made Rome the mistress of the world, which enabled that great empire to spread itself over the civilised globe, holding in its hands the destiny of peoples and the fate of nations, whose sons shed an eternal lustre on their age and achieved a reputation lasting as long as humanity itself—all these heroic acts and glorious deeds were not associated with the Church. Even in more modern times we discover the names of illustrious unbelievers adorning the pages of history—some doubters of Christian dogmas, some indifferent to all theology, others advanced thinkers, Deists, Unitarians, and Rationalists; all unbelievers from the orthodox standpoint. From Roger Bacon to Spencer in philosophy, from Priestley to Tyndall in science, and from Lucretius to Walt Whitman in poetry—these, with others, have been denounced as sceptics; yet, but for the transcendent achievements of such men, we should in all probability have now been groping in mental darkness and in the worst kind of moral confusion, surrounded by a state of things similar to that so truly described by Pope when he says of Superstition:—

> "She taught the weak to bend, the proud to pray,
> To Powers unseen, and mightier far away;
> She, from the rending earth and burning skies,
> Saw gods descend and fiends infernal rise;
> Here fixed the dreadful, there the blest abodes;
> Fear made her devils, and weak hope her gods:
> Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,
> Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust,
> Such as the souls of cowards might conceive,
> And, formed like tyrants, tyrants would believe.
> Zeal, then, not charity, became the guide,
> And hell was built on spite, and heaven on pride."

It is true that the unbeliever may not be deemed by some as a safe candidate for the orthodox heaven; but on earth he discovers ample opportunity for useful work in the improvement of his race. When, in the fulness of his heart and the wide sympathy of his nature, he throws the golden beams of help and kindness into a sorrowing and distressed home, sacrificing his own comforts in order to help his fellows, making the countenances of the sick, the poor, and the suffering light up with a smile of sunshine, where before darkness and gloom had reigned supreme, is he not fulfilling the highest destiny of man, unbeliever though he be? Religion, even by her most ardent disciples, is portrayed in dark and gloomy colours, as if we had no right to enjoy the beauty and tenderness of the lower world—as if the deepest and purest affections of the heart were unhallowed and unholy. Religion may have a place in the world; but it must not usurp the throne of man's affections, the holiest part of his nature. We will not bow to any altar if it is to rob those we love of our heart's warmest devotion, to dim the lustre of moral greatness and of unsanctified genius. Our love for parents, wife, and children, and, after them, for all the human race, must be paramount in our breasts, though we be counted unbelievers ten times over. Man is man, and not a religious machine. With our feet on the earth and our eyes on the stars, we proclaim mankind sublimer than all else. The world has ever yearned for a full realisation of hope to man and woman. The great heart of humanity has sent forth its longings and aspirations, and these have often returned desolate and disappointed. Priests, temples, and altars have stood in the way of the world's improvement. Again and again

has the music of Nature burst forth. Men have whined over the decadence of the race, and music and song have been hushed in the wailing of those who should have been first and foremost in the great work of human amelioration. But the manifestations will return and burn brighter each time—more brightly than the flame of the altars of Zoroaster or the sacrificial fires of the Jewish priesthood.

Unbelievers are supposed to have no right to the term "sacred," whereas it belongs to them in a much higher sense than it does to the Church. What is truly sacred? The beautiful in art, the true in philosophy, the noble and pure in human conduct—these are all sacred, because they are in harmony with the higher instincts of man, and tend to elevate and regenerate the race. True sacredness does not consist in supernatural power, priestly arrogance, or assumption of authority to our fellow-men. Things are made holy by the temper and conduct of the one who uses them. Man is his own consecrator, whether in his home, at church, or in the temple of science. Where mind speaks to mind, either orally or in writing, and thus impresses for good; where intellect diffuses its choicest blessings abroad among mankind; where learning and thought rise into higher regions of light and truth; where poetry illumines and art charms; where liberty goes forth breaking asunder the chains of the captive; where knowledge dwells and love manifests its power; where virtue reigns supreme and justice bears the sway—there, and there alone, is true sanctification to be found, encircled in the temple of Reality and enthroned upon the pinnacle of Humanity.

Instead of regarding the term "sacred" as repre-

senting these great ennobling qualities and mental activities, the popular believers associate it with certain places, buildings, and theological ceremonies. For instance, Palestine is called the Holy Land, and is looked upon as sacred in consequence of the notion that it was the birthplace of Christianity. It is a most significant fact that, if Palestine did produce a religion, it has been comparatively barren in science, philosophy, and general education. A church is termed "a sacred building," and is thought to be made so through some bishop or other ecclesiastical official performing a ceremony called "consecration," in which prayers are offered and forms complied with of a strictly religious character, and thus the building is supposed to become transformed into a holy temple totally unlike what it was before. The very stones are sacred now, and cannot be used for another purpose without profanation. Can anything in the world be more absurd? Is it not derogatory to man and an insult to human genius? What possible effect upon bricks and stones and mortar and cement can the words of a bishop or any official have? And yet modern professors of theology stand aghast at the folly displayed by Pagan worshippers. It would be exceedingly interesting to have the *modus operandi* of this process of making such things sacred explained to us—to be told what is the nature of the conversion they undergo, and in what sense they differ after consecration from their condition before.

Worse still, the same piece of theological legerdemain is practised in our burial grounds. In cemeteries part of the ground is generally consecrated, and part left in its usual state. The physical difference—and there can be no spiritual, for it will not be

maintained that mould is capable of spiritual impressions—that has been effected by this process is more puzzling than the Athanasian Creed. How deep down does the consecration extend? And does it include any clods of earth that might afterwards be brought to the spot, but which were not there at the time the ceremony was performed? Is the grass that will hereafter grow there also consecrated? And, if so, what will be the effect of eating the said grass upon the bodies of unconsecrated cattle? Shall we get, as a result, consecrated beef and mutton?

But, in all seriousness, what is consecrated ground? And what power has priest or bishop or pope, by the reciting of any form of words, to accomplish anything of the kind? One of our poets has well written, as a rebuke to these miserable superstitions:—

> "What's hallowed ground? 'Tis what gives birth
> To sacred thoughts in souls of worth.
> Peace! Independence! Truth! Go forth
> Earth's compass round,
> And your high priesthood shall make earth
> All hallowed ground."

This is the true consecration, the real making holy; for not by ridiculous ceremony, but by noble thoughts, is everything hallowed and made sacred on earth.

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

WHAT is nature? Of course, most persons know what is meant by nature, in part at all events; and the only difference in opinion or definition that can arise will be as to its totality. There are a thousand facts lying all around us, and a thousand phenomena of which we are every day eye-witnesses, that all will agree to call nature. The question, however, does not concern these, but others, real or imaginary, which differ somewhat from them, and which are supposed, therefore, to be incapable of being classed under the same head. Those who desire to obtain a clear and accurate idea of nature cannot do better than read carefully John Stuart Mill's excellent essay on the subject, published after his death. He gives two definitions, or rather two senses, in which we use the word in ordinary, every-day language. The first is that in which we mean the totality of all existence, and the other that in which we use the term as contra-distinguished from art—nature improved by man. But it must be borne in mind that this is still nature. Nature improved by man is only one part of nature modified by another; for man is as much a portion of nature as the earth on which he treads, or the stars which glow in the midnight sky over his head. Nature, therefore, as we understand it, and as Mill defines it in his first sense, is

everything that exists, or that can possibly come into existence in the hereafter—that is, all the possibilities of existence, whether past, present, or future. If it be asked on what ground we include in this definition that which to-day does not exist, but may come into existence hereafter, we reply: Because that which will be must be, potentially at least, now. No new entity can come into being; all that can occur is the commencement of some new form of existence, which has ever had a being potentially. No new force can appear; some new form of force may. But, then, that, when it comes, will be as much a part of nature as the rest—is, indeed, even now a part of nature, since it is latent somewhere in the universe. Nature, in a word, is everything, besides which, to us, there is and can be nothing.

We speak of human nature as though it were in some sort of sense superior to nature in general, which in fact it is. One part of nature may be higher than another according to human conception, for all nature is not the same in every particular. We have inorganic nature—that is, nature in which only certain forms of force are seen in operation; then we have vegetable, animal, and the last, the highest of all, human nature, in which forces are displayed not seen in any other part of nature. All these phenomena, however, are natural. The profound thought of Plato, Aristotle, and Bacon, and the mighty flights of genius manifested in the productions of Homer, Horace, Virgil, Dante, Milton, or Shakespeare, are as natural as the growth of a plant, the rolling of a stone, the descent of the dew, or the evolution of a world.

The question is frequently asked, What do we

know of nature? Our reply is that all we do know is of nature. The attempt, therefore, that is often made to prove man ignorant of nature is really an endeavour to prove him ignorant of everything, inasmuch as there is nothing else of which he can possibly have any knowledge. That our knowledge of nature is at present small we do not deny; but it is large compared with what it was, and no doubt it will be larger still in the future if we only devote proper time to the manifold lessons which she is always presenting to earnest students. Instead of boasting of our superabundance of knowledge, we rather lament our ignorance, but it is of that which can be known, not of that which is to us unknowable, and about which it is useless to inquire and idle to speculate. With us the natural is the field of the knowable, and in this field we are content to work. So far as we have gone we are certain of the road that we are travelling, we walk on solid ground, and we have no fear for the future. We may err in our interpretations of some of the facts of the universe, but we feel assured from past experience that further investigations will rectify such errors, and even while they remain they are slight and trivial and such as are common to fallible man. If we leave this road of nature, it can but be to wander in quagmires, surrounded by dense fogs, with no light to guide us except a will-o'-the-wisp.

Dr. McCosh has said: "In this world there is a set of objects and agencies which constitute a system or cosmos, which may have relations to regions beyond [beyond what?], but is all the while a self-contained sphere with a space around it.....This system we call nature." But this very system constitutes all we

know, not possessing faculties that can take us any further. Such a system being nature, the laws in operation in it are natural laws, and the forces by which everything is brought to pass are natural forces. Our knowledge is bounded by these, and from them it receives its limitation. To talk, therefore, of that which lies beyond—if even it were possible to conceive of a beyond—must be mere speculation, nothing more.

It is sometimes objected against the position here affirmed that, upon the principle that nature is everything, and that whatever is done must be accomplished by natural powers and forces, no law of nature can be broken, for that would imply that nature can act against herself. Now, the error of this objection is in supposing that, because the totality of all things is nature, therefore there can be no conflict in the various parts. Nature, as a whole, cannot, of course, be altered; but one portion may and does come into conflict with another. A man may use his physical powers, which are of course natural, to do that which produces injury on his bodily organisation, which is also quite natural, and we say he has broken a law of nature. We do not, however, mean that he has done anything which nature did not give him the power to do, but that he has used his power to a disadvantage to himself, and, it may be, to others. The expression, therefore, is relative, not absolute.

It is further objected that, as there are certain acts which we are in the habit of speaking of as being unnatural, how can anything be unnatural if nature includes everything? For instance, we say of a man who treats those of his own kith and kin cruelly that he acts unnaturally, and we designate certain crimes

as unnatural offences. But we do not mean by such phraseology that these acts are *super* natural, but *infra* natural—that is, they are not higher, but lower, than nature. Further, a moment's reflection will show that by the use of these terms we do not intend to convey the idea that anything has been done outside of nature, as a whole, for the very powers employed are natural, and the acts are no less so. What is meant is that a person who so acts has pursued a course of conduct which is not in harmony with our exalted conception of the sphere in nature to which he belongs. Measured by ordinary standards, one part of nature is higher than another. Man's sphere is the highest of all that we are acquainted with; he has intellect in a far superior degree than any other animal, and he has evolved a moral law by which he is supposed to regulate his conduct. Now, if, instead of conforming to the laws of his own being, he descends to a lower platform and acts in a way that is utterly out of harmony with his exalted functions, we say that he is unnatural, meaning thereby that he is descending to a lower sphere in nature than that which we have a right to expect him to occupy. The act that we call unnatural in him would probably be natural enough in a lower animal, and therefore cannot be outside nature, but is only out of accord with the requirements of that part of nature in which he plays his part. There is evidently a legitimate function for every passion and desire of which man finds himself possessed, and the proper use of these, according to the purpose of nature, we call natural; while to divert them from their proper object or end we say is unnatural. A man has an appetite for food, which is natural; but he can starve himself to death,

which, in a sense, is natural too, and yet in another sense we should say it was unnatural, because it was a violation of an instinct common to us all. Suppose a starving man to be destitute of food, and his own child, who has plenty, refuses that aid to his parent which would save his life, we should regard such a son as being unnatural, not meaning thereby that he had done anything that nature did not furnish the means of doing, but that he had not acted according to the higher laws of his nature which appertain to all beings moving in his sphere. All, therefore, that can be done, said, or thought is, and must be, natural in the widest sense of that term. Man's beginnings were in nature; his every act is natural, his thoughts are natural, and in the end Mother Nature will fold him in her embrace, close his eyes in death, and furnish in her own bosom his last and final resting-place. Beyond her he cannot go. She was his cradle, and will be his grave; while between the two she furnishes the stage on which he plays his every part. And more, she has made him, the actor, to play the parts. Nature is one and indivisible. She had no beginning, and can have no end. She is the All-in-all. Combined in her are the One and the Many which so perplexed the philosophers of ancient times.

The grandeur of Nature must be obvious to all who reflect on its many beauties. The massive rocks, the golden sunset, the glowing stars, the rolling waves, the rippling brook, the grassy mead, the trees with their luxuriant foliage, and the flowers of every variety of hue, which have delighted and charmed mankind during all ages, are but the treasures and sights of Nature. The poet who has revelled in these natural gems, painting them in words which have

stirred the emotions to their lowest depths and made the objects themselves stand out in clear outline conspicuous to the reader, is the poet of Nature, who finds in the external universe food for his highest powers. Where is there a subject more grand and ennobling? Even that higher development of the poetic genius, which deals, like Shakespeare, with the thoughts, feelings, and passions of men, does but depict another phase of Nature, profounder and more sublime, but Nature still. Milton, too, who was the poet of the supernatural so-called, has but transferred the passions and impulses of men into another sphere, imaginary, it is true, but copied from the world of fact. For Imagination herself cannot escape beyond the bounds of the natural. It is said that the poet "gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name"; but his airy nothings are simply copies of real things, and the location he assigns to them is always a natural one. Shakespeare's supernatural characters are but men—men, it may be, with some more exalted powers and some higher attributes than men possess in the world of fact; but they are no less men for that, and the exaltation of their powers is always in the direction of Nature. The philosopher whose profound thought shall live while humanity remains on the earth, making the one who gave birth to such lofty ideas what is called immortal, never goes beyond Nature in his deepest penetration into the secret springs of the universe and of man.

Nature extends beyond all we can conceive of. Her glory is the glory of the great Whole, her power the power of the Infinite. The highest attributes which we can imagine are hers, for from her we borrowed our ideas of what she is, or what her

possibilities are. Our thoughts are in Nature and of Nature. Our ideas are pictures of her revelations to the mind of man; our sublimest conceptions are but reproductions in mental visions of her doings before our eyes.

Now, what is our chief business in relation to the universe of things? It is to learn all we can in regard to the great laws and mighty forces operating around us and in us. There must ever remain a field for the exercise of our faculties in such inquiries, for Nature is unlimited in her resources, as she is in her potency and extent.

The scientific discoveries of this age show what can be done in the way of obtaining knowledge of the powers and forces of the universe. Those who will cast their thoughts back to the commencement of the nineteenth century, and then reflect what has been accomplished since that time, cannot help being startled at the contrast between things as they then were and as they now exist. It is not necessary to enter into detail here regarding the tremendous onward movement that investigation and discovery have made within that period. In these days of cheap popular literature almost every person is acquainted with the facts. The wonder to us is how our fathers progressed at all in the absence of discoveries which we deem essential to every-day life. Railways, gas, the telegraph, the telephone, photography, and many other such advantages, came all into use during the nineteenth century. Had any man a hundred years ago predicted the state of things existing to-day, he would have been considered a fit subject for a lunatic asylum. Had such results been imagined, they would have been deemed supernatural. Nature has thus far

disclosed the great things which for ages had lain hidden in her arcana. This she has done in obedience to patient and persistent investigation on the part of a noble and hard-working band of men—the devotees of science.

The discoveries already made are an indication of what is yet to come. From what has been we may judge of what may be. Earnest men are still pursuing their patient investigations into Nature. They study her laws, they question her phenomena, they interrogate her doings, and they never go unrewarded for their toil and their pains. Something new is constantly being brought to light to lessen the load of human woe and sorrow, and bring about harmony among mankind.

The laws of Nature are our guide in life, and the grandeur of Nature is our inspiration. The forces of the universe we know only in their manifestations; but that is sufficient—more we do not need. It was a wise saying of the great German philosopher, Goethe: "Man is not born to solve the problems of existence; but he must nevertheless attempt it in order that he may know how to keep within the bounds of the knowable." We should aim, therefore, to be consistent students of Nature in all her marvellous manifestations. We are, as Bacon says, ministers and interpreters of Nature; farther than that we have no desire to go. In trees and stars and suns and flowers, in the solid earth and the expansive sea, in the growing plants and moving animals, and, above all, in the great mind of man, we find our sole delight, our simple care, and the basis of all our hopes for the world and all it contains.

As to the supernatural, there have been a large

number of books written on the subject, some of them by men of eminence in their respective departments of thought; and yet the matter is still left in a state of obscurity. It has, of course, been dealt with from very different standpoints, and therefore exceedingly conflicting arguments have been brought to bear upon it. The subject has been made the theme of several large works, of hundreds of magazine articles, and of thousands of pulpit discourses; and by this time, therefore, some clear idea ought to be obtained as to the differentiation between these two spheres, if there are two; but the whole question is still enveloped in the densest darkness. There must be some cause for this, and the cause, probably, is not far to seek. The natural we know; but the supernatural, what is that? Of course, as its name implies, it is something higher than nature—something above it. But, if there is a sphere higher, and yet often breaking through her domain, nature itself must be limited by something, and the question that once arises is, By what is such limitation fixed, and what is the boundary-line which marks it off and separates it from the supernatural? And this is just what writers are not agreed upon. But, further, supposing such a line to be discovered and to be well known, so that no obstacle could arise in pointing it out, a still more difficult problem presents itself for solution—namely, how man, who is a part of nature, and able only to come into contact with nature, can push his knowledge into that other sphere which, being non-natural, cannot be at all accessible to a natural being? If the supernatural region be synonymous with the unknowable, it clearly cannot concern us, simply because we have no faculties with

which to cognise it, and no powers capable of penetrating into its mysteries. In this case, as far as we are concerned, there is practically no supernatural, for none can operate on that sphere in which man lives and moves and displays his varied and in some respects very marvellous powers. Professor Huxley thought that every new discovery in science pushed the supernatural further away from us by enlarging the boundary of human knowledge of nature.

According to many writers, the spiritual is the supernatural, because it is not under the control of natural law. But why? If man be partly a spiritual being, why should not natural law extend into the sphere of his spiritual nature? Indeed, an able writer on the Christian side, whose work has been enthusiastically received by all religious denominations—Professor Drummond—has maintained this position, the very title of his book stating the whole case: *Natural Law in the Spiritual World.* The great German philosopher, Kant, calls nature the realm of sensible phenomena, conditioned by space, and speaks of another sphere as a world above space, depleted of sense, and free from natural law, and therefore supersensible and supernatural. But this is to make the supernatural spaceless and timeless—in fact, a mere negation of everything, and therefore nothing. Now, the only light in which we can look at this subject, with a view of obtaining anything like clear and correct ideas, is that of modern science. By her the boundary of our knowledge has been greatly enlarged, and through her discoveries we have been enabled to obtain more sound information regarding the laws of the universe than it was possible for our fathers, with

the limited means at their disposal, to possess. Looking at the universe by which we are surrounded, and of which we ourselves form a part, we see law in operation everywhere, and this law we call natural law.

If there be a sphere where the supernatural plays a part and exercises any control, it must clearly be in some remote region, of which we have, and can have, no positive knowledge; and the forces in operation must be other than those with which we are conversant upon this earth. Science cannot recognise the supernatural, because she has no instruments which she can bring to bear upon, and no means at her disposal for, its investigation. She leaves to the theologian all useless speculations regarding such a region, contenting herself with reminding him that he is, in all such discussions, travelling outside the domain of facts into a province which should be left to poets and dreamers, and which belongs solely to the imagination. All law is, and must be, natural law, from a scientific standpoint, because we can have access to nature, and to nature only. It is impossible to get beyond her domain, even in imagination.

The supernatural, if it exist, must reveal itself through nature, for in no other way can it reach us so as to produce any impression upon the human mind. But, if it come through nature, then how can it be distinguished from the phenomena of nature? It will be simply impossible to differentiate between them. We are quite precluded from saying, Nature could not do this, and is unable to do that. No man can fix a limit to the possibilities of power in nature. She has already done a thousand things which our forefathers would have declared impossible, and she will doubtless in the future, under further discoveries

and advances in science, do much more which will look impossible to us. Whatever, therefore, comes through nature must be natural, for the very reason that it comes to us in that way. And the business of Science is to interpret it in the light of natural law. Even if she should prove herself incompetent to the task, it would only show that some phenomena had been witnessed which had for a time baffled explanations, not that anything supernatural had occurred. And the business of science would be to at once direct itself to the new class of facts, with a view to finding the key with which to open the lock and disclose the secret of the power by which they were produced.

Now, what is meant by this alleged Supernatural? According to Dr. Bushnell, "That is supernatural, whatever it be, that is not in the chain of natural cause and effect, or which acts on the chain of cause and effect in nature without the chain." But, it may fairly be asked, is there any such cause, and, if so, where? Is not every link in the chain that we see or can conceive of natural? Moreover, were there any other link or chain, how could we recognise it or distinguish it from nature? True, Dr. Bushnell attempts to explain his meaning, and in so doing he practically gets rid of the supernatural altogether. He says: "If the processes, combinations, and results of our system of nature are interrupted or varied by the action of God, or angels, or men, so as to bring to pass that which would not come to pass by its own internal action under the mere law of cause and effect, such variations are in like manner supernatural." Now, this reasoning is based upon the supposition that things are brought about by some

power higher than the ordinary law of cause and effect. If this be meant to be taken absolutely, then we most emphatically deny it. But if, as it would seem, Dr. Bushnell simply means cause and effect in external nature apart from intelligent beings, that is to take far too limited a view of the law. For man himself is as much a creature of law as a tree or a star, and all he does is accomplished by, not outside, the law of cause and effect. But were it otherwise, as this writer appears to suppose, then man's actions are all supernatural, which is virtually giving up the supernatural altogether, in the sense in which it is usually understood. Definitions of the supernatural are given by the Duke of Argyle and Dr. McCosh that do not differ greatly from that offered by Dr. Bushnell. Dr. McCosh speaks of even miracles as not being against nature in any other sense than that in which one natural agent may be used against another, as water may be employed to counteract fire, which is, in fact, to bring the supernatural into nature, and to obliterate all distinction between them.

It is said that there are exceptional cases in which the supernatural has broken through the natural, and thus become objects of sense in the same way as the rising and setting of the sun, the ebb and flow of the tides, or any other natural phenomena, and that these must be judged of by the ordinary laws of evidence. The reply to this, however, is that the alleged supernatural, if it shows itself in its manifestations to man, must either come through nature or in some other way. But there is no other way known to us, for man cannot get on the outside of nature even in thought. The most extravagant flights of imagination

that we find, either in poetry or in the products of religious ecstasy, are always shaped in natural moulds, either as a whole or, what is more general, in their parts. No image formed in the human mind can possibly be other than natural, if not in its entirety, at least in the component parts of which it is made up. We can conceive of a centaur, though no such thing ever existed, or of a mermaid, though no person has ever seen one, these being creatures purely of the imagination. They are compound things, each part of which has been seen a hundred times, and are formed by blending a portion of one animal with a part of another, thus making an image which on the whole is unnatural, but the parts of which are taken from nature. Men speak of angels, but either they have no idea at all in their minds what they are speaking of, and merely use a meaningless word, or else they think of a human being with the addition of wings or some other abnormal appendage. It is a noteworthy fact that those much-talked-of angelic appearances recorded in the Bible are really descriptions of men. Its God is pictured in a human form, and the Holy Ghost assumes the shape of a dove. Christianity itself is represented as being a supernatural revelation, yet every one of its doctrines came through a natural medium. The writers who penned the various books of the Bible were men, and we have but their bare assertions that what they taught had any other than a natural origin. Even if their honesty be proved unimpeachable, there still arises the question as to whether they might not have been deceived. At all events, there is no manifestation of the supernatural, all the revelations coming through nature. And in that very transmission they must

have become so much blended with the purely natural that it would be impossible to distinguish the one from the other. All this shows that we have no faculties by which the supposed supernatural can be as much as imagined in our minds. The moment that we fancy we think of it, we borrow our ideas from Nature; so that even in imagination we cannot and do not transcend her boundaries. The fact is, man cannot travel beyond the natural, he having no experience of anything outside or apart from its domain. To assert that the so-called supernatural is the cause of the natural is to allege that which is the very reverse of what we know to be fact. If we trace what is termed the supernatural to its origin, we shall find it end in nature. This may appear paradoxical, but it is nevertheless true.

Dr. Moncure D. Conway very aptly says in his *Lessons for the Day:* "Supernature is a disjointed dream of nature as seen by science. It is the morning vision of Art; the artist realises that more ideal world with which nature is in labour. Knowledge, Art, Poetry, enter the ideal kingdom by the door; Superstition tries to scramble over the walls, and gets maimed in the attempt. The supernaturalist believes that one day an iron axe swam on the river Jordan; but at the command of knowledge millions of tons of iron are swimming to-day on many waters. He says certain jars of water flushed to wine; but by culture the rains of heaven falling on a thousand hills are turned to wine. We want no supernature. That is mere calumny on nature, and caricature of the best in it. What we need is harmony with nature—harmony with its laws, that we may have health; sympathy with its beauty, that we may be pure; obedience to its

conditions, that we may command its forces and inspire them with human purpose. In nature is the constancy which is our dependence and our development; in it the potentiality Reason, which is our only source of Wisdom; in it the Love which attends the loving from the cradle to the grave. Ignorance can see it only as chaos in one age, accursed in another; superstition can find but terror in its laws, and hope only in their fancied overthrow by arbitrary thaumaturgy of omnipotence; but wherever the mind of man flowers, nature flowers in response, filling every sense with beauty, giving mind and heart their deeper satisfaction, steadily incarnating every pure ideal."

It should be observed that there is a marked distinction between belief and knowledge. We may, and do, have faith in that of which we have no real or actual knowledge, for we are compelled to exercise such faith in every-day life upon numerous topics. The point to be remembered is that, if we are judicial or rational, we shall be careful that our belief is not opposed to knowledge. We may, and do, believe in countries which we have never seen; in the existence of persons with whom we have never come into contact, and of countless things of which we have had no actual experience; but, if we are wise, we shall always be on our guard against taking for granted that which is highly improbable, to say nothing of the impossible. If a man asserted that one thing was in two places at the same time, we should not stop to ask for the evidence that he had to produce, because no amount of evidence could serve to substantiate as a truth that which we knew by the very nature of things to be impossible. Testimony is highly valuable, of course; but there are many subjects which

no amount of evidence could prove, simply because the matter is of such a nature as not to admit of proof. Suppose, for instance, someone had said that he had visited a country where two and two made five, we should at once draw the inference that either the man stated what was not true, or else that he attached a different meaning to the words employed than that which we are in the habit of giving to them. A man tells us that he has seen a miracle, and that, therefore, he knows from experience that the supernatural does exist, and he brings a dozen persons to verify his statement. What are we to do in such a case? A moment's reflection may show that the testimony is unimpeachable, while the conclusion is perfectly erroneous. The event which he describes may have happened, but how is it to be proved to be a miracle? The forces in operation in its production may be to him unknown; he may never have seen them in operation before; indeed, they may be new to all mankind, but still his evidence could simply vouch for the fact; and the cause must be a matter for inquiry. The thing, no doubt, happened in Nature, for no experience can extend beyond that, and the assertion that the forces producing it were supernatural is a gratuitous one, and not only not supported by the laws of evidence, but utterly opposed to everything that we know. Belief should have a rational basis, or it is wild and chimerical. Faith is good in its place, but it must always be confined within the sphere of knowledge. A man may have faith in that which he never saw and, perhaps, never will see; to this there can be no objection; but the thing in which he has faith must be a possible one, or his faith is misplaced, and he is deluded. Now, faith in the supernatural is an

unreasoning faith, pre-supposing a knowledge which we do not, and cannot, possess, since a knowledge of that which lies beyond Nature is an impossibility. The sphere of faith is legitimate enough; it is not, however, a sphere distinct from that of knowledge, but one which arises out of it, and should never go beyond it. We know certain things and believe others, but the latter are always more or less connected with the former. Faith in the order of nature is reasonable, because it is based on experience; faith in the supernatural is absurd, because it is opposed to all possible knowledge—not only to the knowledge that we have, but to all that it is in any way possible for us to have.

Of course, there is a region in which speculation may be tolerated, but it must be tolerated as speculation, nothing more. The misfortune is that those, as a rule, who indulge in speculation make their theories do duty as facts. They not only invest their ideas with the importance of legitimate deductions from facts, but give to them the value of facts themselves. It is against this we protest. When men talk about matters of which no one can know anything, they may be harmless enough as dreamers; but when they endeavour to bend men of reason and thought to their way of thinking, resorting sometimes even to persecution to promulgate their idle whims, then they are dangerous, and can no longer be regarded with impunity. Society has to suffer for their errors, and it is the duty of every member of that society to lift up his or her voice against either their wilful perversion of truth or their innocent misapprehension of facts. Such, as a rule, are the orthodox believers in the supernatural and the popular advocates of speculative views on religion.

We may ask, and it is a very legitimate question, What effect has it had on the world to substitute reckless belief for knowledge, and to indulge in idle speculation regarding the supernatural? To say the least of it, men's minds have thereby been diverted from the real business of life; their attention has been taken from the things that are known, and the study of which would prove serviceable to us, to occupy their mental powers upon matters of which no knowledge is to be attained. To say such a course is a waste of time would be to treat the matter far too lightly. It is much more than that. It has led to incorrect thinking, to loose reasoning, to the drawing of false conclusions, and to the substitution of imagination for reality. The lesson from experience is that theological beliefs, when sincerely and fanatically entertained, are manifested more or less in conduct. It is, therefore, our duty to inculcate more reliance upon practical knowledge and less dependence upon fanciful beliefs. It is well known that "knowledge is power," for to its influence the world is indebted for its progress, and it enables those who possess and utilise it to fight the more earnestly, and with a better prospect of winning, the great battle of life.

Natural religion is based on love, while so-called supernatural religion is based on fear. Many persons object to the use of the term "religion," and no doubt the objection would be a good one if that word retained its old orthodox associations. There is, however, a rapidly-growing tendency to employ the word in its etymological and ethical meaning rather than in its alleged supernatural sense. Accepting religion as ethical unity, established to promote the welfare of mankind on earth, its proper basis is enlightened

benevolence. This great human instinct is not dependent upon any form of supernaturalism for its manifestation; its activity is evoked by a desire to alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted, and to improve the position of the unfortunate. The hope of securing a fair opportunity for the exercise of this true benevolence prompts the lover of nature to aim at correcting every error by the substitution of a true knowledge of the natural for the old doubtful speculations as to the supernatural. History teaches that, when supernatural religion has been aught more than a system of mere belief and profession, it has conduced to wrong action. The records of mankind furnish ample proof of this. Whether it be Pagans with their deities, Jews with their Jehovah, or Christians with their Trinity, such theologisms have brought forth cruelty, oppression, and intolerance. Truth, virtue, and love are the three elements which should go towards the foundation of natural religion. They formed a humanitarian religion in the case of Buddhism; they form the basis of the great religious humanitarianism of Auguste Comte; they, with the great science of man's true education and enlightened benevolence, as promulgated by that great philanthropist, Robert Owen, formed what probably will be ultimately accepted as a practical religion of daily life. The love insisted upon by natural religion is, moreover, active love. It does not reach to the clouds or attempt to penetrate behind the veil of Nature into the region of the unknown and unknowable, but it aims only at instructing and inspiring human nature, so that there may be perfect harmony between that and external nature, and absolute peace, concord, and kindliness between man and man. It is not anti-

Christian, in so far as the Christian believer remains true to the lessons of love, of mercy, of justice, and of well-doing. The supernaturalist talks of Jesus as though he had more than human love for man, and a superhuman desire to affect his welfare. The naturalist, instead of this, maintains that the same lofty feeling of philanthropy, of brotherly love, beats in every human bosom, and needs only wise and patient cultivation to bring forth golden fruit. Natural religion declares that there can be no grander impulse, no loftier, more animating incentive, than an honest, steadfast desire to benefit the whole human race.

Among the first indications we find in human history of the supernatural feeling is fetichism—the worshipping of trees, rocks, animals, etc. If, however, fetichism were only such as is here described, it would be naturalism, not supernaturalism, inasmuch as a tree, a stone, an animal, a fish, or a bird, is each something pertaining to nature. Such worship, however, was given, primarily, not to the tree, etc., but to an imaginary something supposed to be latent or hidden in the perceptible object adored. In this manner there gradually grew up among primæval men the notion of a non-natural—that is, a supernatural—world, a world of spirits, of beings which lay, as it were, at the back of all phenomena. Religion, to be acceptable to the intellects of the present age, must be recognised in its truest sense—as a binding system between man and man—as being based on Nature, from whose prolific source the highest thoughts, the purest conceptions, and the loftiest inspiration are derived.

The theological delusion that supernatural religion alone supplies the motive for personal excellence

arose through people entertaining the erroneous idea that natural means were impotent to cure the evils that dominate society. It has, however, been discovered that vice must be dealt with like all else that is human. A supernatural remedy for moral disease appears to the student of nature no more reasonable than a supernatural cure for any of the physical diseases which "flesh is heir to." When a man feels the pangs of some physical malady, he knows that there is some derangement in the organ in which they occur; in addition to applying a remedy, if he be wise, he will endeavour to discover the cause, so as to try and avoid the malady in future. Now, Rationalists consider that the same course should be taken with moral diseases, which often arise from a morbid condition of the brain, produced sometimes by the bad arrangements of society, or through not acting up to the proper duties of life. Virtue and vice are not mere accidents of the time, but are as much the consequence of the operation of natural laws as the falling of a stone or the growth of a flower. The causes of crime should be investigated as carefully as the causes of cholera and other epidemics have been. The physical and the moral are more closely connected than is generally supposed, and the influence of the one upon the other is, beyond all doubt, very great. Man's mental and moral natures both depend upon material organs, and are therefore influenced by physical forces; and it is not unusual for the same causes that generate disease to produce crime. So little, however, do people study the relation of mind to brain that vice prevails where, with a little judicious thought and action, virtue might be found. The Rationalist acknowledges these important facts, and,

expecting no supernatural help, he goes earnestly to work himself. Holding that whatever happens occurs in accordance with some law, he deems it his business to endeavour to ascertain what that law is, that he may turn it to some practical account.

With the extensive knowledge which now exists, allied with intellectual culture, it is not difficult to demonstrate that man ought to do his duty for reasons which belong alone to this life. By the word "duty" is here meant an obligation to perform actions that have a tendency to promote the personal and general welfare of the community. This obligation is imposed upon us by the requirements of society. For instance, the obligation to speak the truth is obtained from experience, which teaches that lying and deceit tend to destroy that confidence between man and man which has been found to be necessary to maintain the stability of mutual societarian intercourse.

Again, our obligation to live straightforward lives is derived from the fact that, as we are here and are recipients of certain advantages from society, we deem it a duty to repay, by life service, the benefits thus received. To avoid this obligation, either by self-destruction or by any other means, except we are driven to such a course by what have been termed "irresistible forces," is, in our opinion, cowardly and unjustifiable. As to the word "ought," the only explanation orthodox Christianity gives to this term is a thoroughly selfish one. It says you "ought" to do so and so for "Christ's sake," that through him you may avoid eternal perdition. On the other hand, Rationalism finds the meaning of "ought" in the very nature of things, as involving duty, and implying that something is due to others.

As the Rev. Minot J. Savage, in his *Morals of Evolution*, aptly puts it: "Man ought—what?—ought to fulfil the highest possibility of his being; ought to be a man; ought to be all and the highest that being a man implies. Why? That is his nature. He ought to fulfil the highest possibilities of his being; ought not simply to be an animal. Why? Because there is something in him more than an animal. He ought not simply to be a brain, a thinking machine, although he ought to be that. Why? Because that does not exhaust the possibilities of his nature: he is capable of being something more, something higher than a brain. We say he ought to be a moral being. Why? Because it is living out his nature to be a moral being. He ought to live as high, grand, and complete a life as it is possible for him to live, and he ought to stand in such relation to his fellow-men that he shall aid them in doing the same. Why? Just the same as in all these other cases: because this, and this only, is developing the full and complete stature of a man, and he is not a man in the highest, truest, deepest sense of the word until he is that and does that; he is only a fragment of a man so long as he is less and lower."

The careful and unbiassed student of nature will discover that therein continuous law is to be found, but no accidents or contingencies. And what we call the moral state is one wherein man is enabled to recognise the wisdom of compliance with this law. It is quite true that men may refuse to obey the moral law, but, if they do, they must suffer in consequence. This is one reason why men should be rational, inasmuch as the fact of being so brings its own reward. A man of honour—one whose word is his bond, who practises

virtue in his daily life—wins the respect and confidence of all who know him, and he thereby sets an example that will be useful to emulate; and he at the same time acquires for himself a tranquillity of mind known only to the consistent devotee of the highest morality. What is called Christian morality has no sanction in merely natural sentiments and associations. Nobility of action is supposed by orthodox believers to be the result of a "fire kindled in the soul by the Holy Ghost." St. Paul is reported to have entertained the grovelling notion that, if this life is "the be-all and end-all," then "we are of all men the most miserable"; "therefore," says he, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Here the problematical happiness in a problematical future is put forth as a higher incentive to goodness than the wish to so regulate our conduct that it will produce certain beneficial results in our present existence. Persons who share the views of St. Paul, as set forth in 1 Cor. xv., will derive but little pleasure from the virtue of this world. The satisfaction which should be felt in benefiting mankind independently of theology falls unheeded on orthodox believers. They fail to experience happiness simply by the performance of good works. Virtue, to them, has no charms if not prompted by the "love of God." Nobility, heroism, generosity, devotion, are all ignored unless stimulated by the hope of future bliss. A man who is virtuous only because he is commanded to be so, or through fear of punishment after death, is not in touch with the philosophy of modern ethics. A moral man is one who does his duty, regardless of personal reward or punishment in any other world.

Regard for the moral law is not based upon a

negation, neither is it a mere question of expediency, but rather a positive acting principle, working for practical goodness. A really moral man is one who is interested in the well-being of others—one who knows that he belongs to the family of men, whose social advancement depends, more or less, upon each member. Unsocial beings are those who care for nobody but themselves, and whose sense of right-doing consists in studying their own interests without concerning themselves about the welfare of others. Emerson said: "I once knew a philosopher of this kidney. His theory was, 'Mankind is a damned rascal. All the world lives by humbug; so will I.'" Fortunately, individuals of this type are becoming fewer and fewer, and are being replaced by men and women in whom are to be found aspirations for the true, the useful, and the elevating functions of life. To such members of the human family as these it can be made evident that truth and honour are essential to their well-being, and that doing good is an absolute necessity to the formation and perpetuation of a society based on confidence and trust. The virtue of veracity is the foundation of the true social fabric. Law, commerce, friendship, and all the embellishments of life rest upon the great principle of veracity. It is this which gives the surest stability to all moral obligation. While being faithful to ourselves, we should never fail to manifest fidelity in our associations with all members of the community. Our aim ought always to be to so serve others that we may help ourselves, and to so serve ourselves as to be helpful to others. As Pope puts it:—

"Self-love and social is the same."

Emerson has said: "The mind of this age has

fallen away from theology to morals. I conceive it to be an advance." Undoubtedly this is true, for the intellect of the age is more than ever finding its justification for being good in the results of action, rather than in the commands of creeds and dogmas. The inspiration to goodness is now recognised more than ever as being natural, not supernatural.

Darwin, in his *Descent of Man*, gives reasons, based upon natural requirements, why we should live proper lives. He points out that the possession of moral qualities is a great aid in the struggle for existence; that people with strong moral feelings are more likely to win in the race of life than persons who are destitute of such feelings. Morality has in itself its own recommendation, inasmuch as it secures for its recipients peace of mind, temperance in their habits, and a sense of justice in their dealings with others. Men of honour, whose lives are regulated by the principle of integrity, furnish the best of all reasons for being moral. They are happy in the consciousness of the nobility of their own nature, and they derive consolation from the knowledge that they render valuable service to others by the dignified example they set and the exalted lives they live. Those who can see the worth of virtue and of truth in human character are imbued with a spirit of emulation; they desire to be associated with a superior order of society. Many members of the community can readily see that without "confidence and trust" the commercial world would collapse. The same principle applies to the whole of human life, for it is not simply that "honesty is the best policy," but that it is the only policy which will secure a tranquil state of existence. Rectitude is the source of self-reliance in life and at death. Men

who are able to distinguish the good from the bad are attracted by honour and refinement. They shun malignity and vulgarity, and are repelled by what is vicious and demoralising. Men should be moral, because morality qualifies them for friendship, and wins for them the esteem of the best of their kind. Further, it awakens within them a sense of what is most fitted to enable them to adopt an elevated mode of living. They become practical believers in that which is just and useful, and they are thereby inspired to strive to realise their ideal born of newer and higher perceptions of truth. Let the lover of morality once be admitted into the presence of the intellectually gifted and morally heroic, and life will present to him a new aspect. When we read of Plutarch's heroes; of Greece, with her art and her literature; of Rome, with her Cicero and her Antoninus; and of the muster-roll of men and women whose memories are surrounded with a halo of intellectual brilliancy and ethical glory, we cannot regard the world as the habitation only of moral invalids and of mental imbeciles. On the contrary, a higher faith in the potency and grandeur of morality is evoked, and we are induced to believe that it will be more than ever appreciated for its own sake, and that it will be honoured and revered for its intrinsic merits.

While admitting that the moral brightness of life is somewhat tarnished by the base, brutal, suicidal, and insane characters that are still found in our midst, we believe in the law of progress and the work of reform. We recognise a powerful motive for being moral in the belief that such conditions may be produced that shall tend to remove depravity and to establish righteousness. Epidemics that once

made uncontrolled havoc upon society have been checked by the application of suitable scientific remedies: why, then, should not moral evils be made to yield to judicious treatment? When men understand that moral law is as certain as physical law, and as necessary to be obeyed if we are to have a healthy state in human ethics, the reformation of the community will be capable of achievement. Whether we regard man as the creature or the creator of circumstances, or as both, it is certain that his organism and its environment act and re-act upon each other. While intelligence indicates the best way to pursue in life, it is obvious that circumstances must be such as to permit of our pursuing that way. From what we know of human nature, it appears to us necessary that it should be surrounded with inducements that have the power to draw out the best that is in it. It has been well said that man is a bundle of habits; therefore moral forces become strong as they become a part of the habit of life. We cannot reasonably expect the State to be ruled by right and love unless these virtues exist in the citizens. No nation has ever attempted to live like a Society of Friends—without gaols, policemen, etc.—because the idea of moral duty has been only partially realised. In proportion as we properly understand the nature of morality and regulate our lives by it, so shall we be governed by ideas instead of by force. The misfortune of our present societarian condition is the difficulty attending its improvement. Although, like trees, we grow and expand from within, there seems, as it were, an iron band around us, that prevents our free expansion and our full growth. The quality of our acts may be good

in a certain degree, but it is not of the required strength. It has been impoverished through neglect and theological adulteration; and what is now required is persistent and intelligent conduct, that shall purify life, and rid it of the legacy of the ignorance, the folly, and the superstition of the dark past. Our hope is in purification; we want earnestness and candour to take the place of the apathy and hypocrisy which have so long held sway. Then virtue will illuminate the hearts of men, and shed its lustre upon the emancipated humanity of the world.

It is often urged that, without a supernatural rule for conduct, all guarantees to virtue would be absent. Not so; Rationalism recognises a safe and never-erring basis for moral action, which is taken, not from the supernatural, but from the natural Roman law of the Twelve Tables, which laid down the broad general maxim that "the well-being of the people is the supreme law." This may be taken as a fundamental principle for all time and all nations. The kind of action which will produce such well-being depends, of course, upon individual and national circumstances, varied in their character and diversified in their influence. This progressive morality is the principle of the utilitarian ethics which now govern the civilised world. It is not merely the individual, but society at large, that is considered. To use an analogy from nature, societarian existence may be compared to a beehive. What does the apiarian discover in his studies? Not that every individual bee labours only for individual necessities. No; but that all is subordinated to the general welfare of the hive. If the drones increase, they are expelled or restricted, and well would it be for our human society if all

drones who resisted improvement were banished from among us. In the moral world, as in religious societies, there are too many Nothingarians—individuals who thrive through the good conduct of others, while they themselves do nothing to contribute to the store of the ethical hive. The morality of men, their love, their benevolence, their kindly charity, their mutual tolerance and long-suffering—all these spring directly from their long-acquired and developed experience. As the poet of Buddhism sings:—

> "Pray not, the Darkness will not brighten! ask
> Nought from the Silence, for it cannot speak!
> Vex not your mournful minds with pious pains:—
> Ah, brothers, sisters! seek
> Nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn,
> Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruit and cakes;
> *Within yourselves* deliverance must be sought;
> Each man his prison makes!"

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